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AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

VOL. II.



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AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

BY

F. W. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF

“GRANDMOTHER’S MONEY,” “NO CHURCH,”

“LITTLE KATE KIRBY,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BOOK II.

A Fallen Fortune.

AS LONG AS SHE LIVED.

CHAPTER I.

THE SALMONS HEAR THE WORST.

TEN days later in the life of Mabel Westbrook, in the fair, bright Summer weather which had come to Penton, the full details of a fallen fortune reached her whom it most concerned. It was the old story of the money market. There had been a terrible panic, a commercial crisis, a collapse, and Mabel Westbrook's inheritance had been swept away in the storm.

The bad news reached Mabel in the morning—it was waiting for her at the breakfast-table, and the stout heart of the little woman, “who did not know what misfortune was,” as Brian

Halfday had told her, throbbed not with any extra pulsation as she broke the seal of the envelope. She read her letter very carefully and coolly, and then smiled across the breakfast-table at the Reverend Gregory Salmon, who was reading his newspaper with his eyes screwed round the corner at her.

"Good news from America?" he inquired, as he met Mabel's glance.

"No, bad news," said Mabel; "some people would say very bad news."

Angelo Salmon and his mother turned towards Mabel, full of interest and sympathy at once.

"Did you say bad news, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Salmon, always easily discomfited. "Oh! I am very sorry. Nobody ill, nobody hurt, I hope!"

"Only somebody heavily hit—is not that the correct phrase, Mr. Salmon, to express certain trouble?"

"I believe so," said Angelo. "It might mean an offer of marriage from a gentleman deeply impressed; he would be 'heavily hit,' Miss Westbrook, you know."

“Poor fellow—yes, he would indeed,” replied Mabel Westbrook, laughing; “well, my letter contains no sentiment, and only one hard fact.”

“You are not going to leave us!” exclaimed Angelo, and his colour actually faded away at the suggestion.

“Have not I trespassed on your kindness too long?” she rejoined.

“Impossible,” said the enthusiastic Angelo.

They had been ten happy days to him, ten days to be looked back at gratefully, with the woman he loved a guest in his father’s house. They had been ten days too much for the rest of his life, but he was not aware of it at the present hour; he felt only suddenly miserable and desolate at the bare thought of this happiness vanishing away. He had been a quiet, grave, unobtrusive young man during Mabel’s stay at the Hospital, and no one was aware of the deep draughts of pleasure which he was taking down by wholesale into his heart at the mere sight of Miss Westbrook, and in the simple consciousness of her being near him, and regarding him as a friend. He was too timid

a man to allow the evidence of his affection to escape—too much afraid of the consequences which might ensue from any precipitate step on his part. If he were rash, he would assuredly lose her; and if he waited patiently, somebody would certainly walk off with her under his very nose, and hence all before him was uncertainty, despite the satisfaction of the present hour. And now the hour was closing for him, and Mabel Westbrook was going away, he was sure of it by her answers.

“It is bad news, indeed, that will take you from us, Miss Westbrook,” said the Master of St. Lazarus politely.

“I am wondering whether it will take me back to America,” said Mabel, thoughtfully.

“For a trip?” inquired young Salmon, nervously.

“For good.”

“I—I thought your idea was to—to settle in England?” Angelo asked, in a tremulous voice.

“Yes, but ideas change rapidly in a world that spins round rapidly too,” answered Mabel; “and if I have my living to get, I must go

back to old friends and old associations, and find my best chance amongst them."

"My dear madam," said the Reverend Gregory Salmon, "you don't mean that——"

"That I have lost all my money," said Mabel very phlegmatically, "yes, I do."

"I am amazed—I am sorry—I am dreadfully shocked," remarked Angelo's father; "dear me, now who could have possibly foreseen this?"

"I have been waiting for the full particulars during the last ten days," said Mabel, "and here they are."

She passed the letter to Mr. Salmon, who took it from her.

"Ten days ago?—you knew it then?" said Mr. Gregory Salmon.

"I knew my grandfather's bank had stopped payment—that big, honest bank, to which he had pinned his faith so firmly! It is as well," she added, "he died before the crash came."

"But there will be something saved from the ruin?" inquired the chaplain.

"I have grave doubts of receiving a half-penny," replied Mabel.

“Bless my soul! it is most extraordinary!” continued the Reverend Gregory Salmon, crumpling his newspaper together in his excitement. “And to think that, with this terrible catastrophe hanging over your head for the last ten days, Miss Westbrook, you could talk and sing and treat matters lightly! It’s amazing to me! I should have had a fit with suspense—I must have gone off to a better world.”

“Probably I shall feel more sorry in good time,” replied Mabel, “but the loss of the money is no affliction to me yet; I have been nominally in possession of it for three months; literally speaking, never in possession of it at all. It is not like losing a fond hope, or a dear friend.”

“Hopes and friends, young lady, will follow the money,” prophesied the Reverend Gregory Salmon.

“False hopes and false friends only—and the sooner the better,” said Mabel, shrugging her shoulders.

“Ahem! yes. Of course, in a world like this—but, dear, dear me! it is so very

extraordinary ! For ten days to know this, and to keep it a secret from us ! Excuse my retiring into the study for a few minutes, to peruse your letter ; I am utterly bewildered."

Mr. Gregory Salmon bustled out of the room with one fat white hand pressed to his forehead ; had the calamity of the money loss been his own he could scarcely have displayed more surprise and excitement. Mabel Westbrook went to the window of the room, sat down, and resumed the fancy-work upon which she had been engaged at an earlier hour that morning. Angelo Salmon, pale, and with his mouth half open, remained at the table. Mrs. Salmon, after a moment's consideration, followed Mabel to the window.

"My dear child," she said, putting her little fat arm round the slender neck of the girl, "you do not know how sorry I am !"

"Yes, I do," answered Mabel, smiling up at her.

"You will trust in Gregory—Mr. Salmon, I mean," she said ; "he is a far-seeing, clever man, Mabel, and will know what is best for you."

"I think I have made up my mind to trust in myself, being a conceited young person," said Mabel. "But there, I will tell you presently ; I am very busy now."

"Purse-knitting too," said Mrs. Salmon, cheerily ; "that does not look as if you had given up all hope."

Mabel laughed merrily, but did not reply. Mrs. Salmon continued her protestations of sympathy and attachment, and Angelo stared across at the speakers in the same vacuous way. Presently a servant entered, to inform Mrs. Salmon that her husband desired to speak to her in the library for a few minutes ; and then the elder lady withdrew, the breakfast-table was cleared, and Angelo rose, stretched his long limbs, and walked slowly towards the recess of the window where Mabel Westbrook was ensconced.

"I can't tell you all I feel about this, Miss Mabel," he said, stammering a great deal during his address, "or how it takes me off my guard like—and floors me, if you will not object to so vulgar an expression—for I am floored completely."

“Like your poor father,” said Mabel, drily.

“Yes, he is very much upset. Is he not?”

“Very.”

“He will not get over the shock quickly,” said Angelo; “he is an excitable man, and the surprise has been a great one.”

“My life has been passed lately in surprising people,” said Mabel, thinking of Adam Halfday, “and you English people are so completely interested when money is in question.”

“You speak as if you were a foreigner,” said Angelo.

“I feel more like a foreigner to-day,” answered Mabel, “and less of the English girl that I fancied I might grow to be.”

“I don’t quite understand you,” Angelo remarked; “but——”

“Please don’t try to understand me,” said Mabel, interrupting him; “it will not do for a gentleman of your position in life to make a study of a lady who has no visible means of subsistence. Your father will prove this more clearly to you.”

“Oh! Miss Westbrook——”

Here he stopped, as her musical voice rip-

pled off into pleasant, unaffected laughter at his astonishment.

"You will think me a very bold young woman to tell you this," said Mabel, "but misfortune has the privilege of speaking frankly sometimes."

"If any——"

She would not allow him to continue. He was obedient to her commands, and a look controlled him into silence.

"I want you to do me a favour," she said.

"Certainly. Anything—everything," he answered, with alacrity.

"I want you to take a stroll across the meadows for an hour or two."

"With—with you?" he asked, timidly.

"Oh! no," she replied, "I am busy this morning, and cannot afford the time for a long walk, which would do you a deal of good."

"I am really quite well, Miss Westbrook, I assure you," was his reply.

"You are pale," said Mabel.

"Yes—but——"

"And I wish you to go very much."

"Yes—but—will you not tell me why?"

were the words he contrived to stammer forth at last.

“Not this morning,” said Mabel, shaking her head.

“When I see you again?”

“When I see you again, very likely.”

“I don’t mind getting out of your way, or going anywhere you wish,” said Angelo, “of course not. Still I should like you to understand before I leave this morning——”

Once more the inexorable Mabel cut him short in his oration.

“It is impossible that this important business will allow me to understand anything fresh just now,” said Mabel, quickly.

“That’s it!” exclaimed Angelo, with renewed excitement, “I knew you were grieving and suffering, and—and so on.”

“Not I,” said Mabel, confidently.

“And I did want to say that having a fortune in my own right, from my poor deceased grandmother, and not knowing what to do with one twentieth part—What’s this?”

Mabel had put the purse which she had been making into his hands, wherein she

left her own hand warmly and confidently.

“Something to keep your money in,” she said, laughing again ; “will you take it for my sake?”

“Have you been really making this for me?”

“Yes, it is not much for a keepsake—I should say, a present, is it?”

“I will treasure it all my life, Miss Westbrook?”

“You can’t do that, because it will wear out too quickly,” said the practical Mabel. “And now, good morning. Thank you for all you would have said in the way of offering me a loan, if I had had the time to ‘negotiate’ one, as the phrase runs. Yes,” she added in a different and more earnest tone, “thank you very heartily for such kind thought of me, Angelo.”

She withdrew her hand from his and left the purse within his grasp instead, and he walked slowly from the room, as he knew she wished him to do. He walked in dreamland, nevertheless, and his heart—his secret heart—was light, not heavy, for all the money losses which had come to Mabel Westbrook. She

seemed nearer to that heart now, and she had called him Angelo for the first time in his life—and life was surely brightening and becoming something that he could comprehend more clearly, in its new solemnity of love and responsibility of care.

As he went across the quadrangle towards the archway beyond, he looked towards Mabel at the window, who smiled brightly and waved her hand towards him—even kissed her hand to him in a light, graceful fashion that was French-like in its way, although more English in its honest impulse.

“God bless her!” said Angelo, “I am glad she is not cast down by her trouble. I will take her for a drive this afternoon.”

CHAPTER II.

CHANGE OF TACTICS.

GOOD Mrs. Salmon found her lord and master still a prey to excitement in the library, whither a forced retirement had not conduced to any of that composure of which he had gone in search. The Master of St. Lazarus was curled up in his arm-chair with Mabel's letter in his hands.

"Did you want me very particularly, Gregory?" asked Mrs. Salmon as she entered, "because I hardly like to leave poor Mabel at present."

"Yes, I do. Poor Mabel, indeed!—a pretty nice mess we have made of this 'poor Mabel' business," he groaned forth.

“Why, what have we done?”

“Acted like a couple of fools, Mrs. Salmon,” said her husband. “But will you shut the door, and sit down for a moment?”

“Certainly, Gregory.”

Mrs. Salmon closed the door, and took the seat which her husband had indicated by an imperious wave of his hand. She waited for his communication, and her round blue eyes and half-open mouth gave her a stronger resemblance to her son at that time.

“We have been very indiscreet, Mrs. Salmon,” continued her husband; “we have believed this young woman’s statement as to her position in life, and we have been deceived.”

“I don’t remember her making any statement, Gregory, and if she had——”

“My dear, don’t interrupt me,” said the Master, “at all events, you and I and Angelo have become, as it were, on terms of intimacy with Miss Westbrook, who, after all, is penniless.”

“Poor thing!”

“Who, after all, may be an adventuress, Mrs.

Salmon—a long-headed, designing young woman.”

“I will never believe it,” said his wife, firmly. “I don’t think, Gregory, you can look me in the face and say that that’s your conviction.”

“Mrs. Salmon,” said the Master, “I don’t know what my conviction is. Here is a stranger—clever and fascinating, we will grant—who meets with Angelo in America, sees how weak and trusting a young fellow he is, becomes his friend, arrives with a letter of introduction from him, settles down in our circle, confuses us with a cock-and-bull story—for presumably it may be a cock-and-bull story—of restitution to Adam Halfday, is made our guest, and then tells us one fine morning that she is as poor as a church mouse, and has kept that fact from us for the last ten days.”

“She wished to be sure of the truth, Gregory.”

“She wished to remain here and ensnare our Angelo, that’s the only truth I can see, ma’am,” affirmed the Reverend Gregory Salmon. “Here is a poor, young, handsome, sharp woman, and

a rich and impressionable young man, and we, like two fools, have, without a single inquiry, done our best to throw them together, and make a match of it."

"Oh, Gregory, don't be so harsh and uncharitable! You can't think all this—I'm sure you can't," said Mrs. Salmon, bursting into tears.

"I have said, Mrs. Salmon, that I do not know what to think," replied her husband, speaking very slowly and deliberately now, "but I am a man in my right senses, and the whole matter strikes me, at present, as an ingenious and elaborate plan, most skilfully carried out. But there is no occasion to make that noise over it, Mrs. Salmon, that I can possibly see."

"Mabel is such a dear g—g—good girl," sobbed Mrs. Salmon.

"Yes—a very dear girl to us, if we don't keep our eyes open," replied her husband, "and that is all I will ask you to do, madam. Miss Westbrook," he added, sinking his voice to a whisper, "must be got out of this house as soon as we can gracefully do it—she must return to America, if possible, and as quickly as possible

—and I will take upon myself to put Angelo on his guard. There is no harm done, the mine has been sprung before its time, I think. I will answer for Angelo's good behaviour under these trying circumstances, if you will get that young person out of the establishment."

"Do you mean to-day?"

"To-day," echoed Mr. Samson, "of course I mean to-day."

"Oh dear! I don't see how to manage it."

"One woman can always talk to another. Tell her we are afraid she must feel herself in a false position among us—say something kind and agreeable, but be very firm, and hint that *I* have thought it for the best also, and after serious consideration of the circumstances which have arisen. You may tell her I am sorry too—and you will not hint in any way that we have the least suspicion of her."

"I haven't," said Mrs. Salmon.

"And you may leave Angelo to me. Thank Heaven, he is a character that I thoroughly understand, and can completely influence. His weakness of disposition has been to us a trial before this," said the Master, "but, after all, it

proves a blessing. He is a child, and to be talked out of a fancy like a child."

"Yes—that's true," assented the wife, "but I would not say a word against Miss Westbrook to him."

"I would not say a word of disparagement of Miss Westbrook to any living soul," affirmed Mr. Salmon, who had a bad memory, and regarded his better half from a soulless point of view, like a Mahommedan.

Mrs. Salmon shed a few more tears over Mabel's new position in life, but she was not prepared to argue the point very deeply with her lord and master. The reverend gentleman had a strong will of his own, and she had never had any strength of purpose to boast of. She was a passive female with a good but flabby heart, and disputes and troubles were out of her way, and distressed her too much to face with philosophy. Perhaps it was all for the best that Mabel Westbrook was to leave the premises—she was certainly poor now—and Angelo's position could always secure him a bride from one of the best families in the county. She was very sorry, nevertheless, and it was all

very dreadful, and she had grown fond of Mabel, but probably it was the wisest course to get her out of the house.

“Have you left Angelo alone with Miss Westbrook?” asked Mr. Salmon suddenly.

“Yes, I have.”

“Go back, please, and tell him I want him,” said Gregory, “it will not do to leave those two together. God bless me, I should not wonder if he has not already offered to lend her all his money !”

And this was not very far from the truth, as the reader is aware.

Mrs. Salmon departed, and in two minutes reappeared.

“Angelo is not with her, Gregory,” she said, “one of the brothers tells me he has just gone across the meads.”

“I’ll follow him and settle this at once,” cried the energetic Master; “a few words will do, and they had better be said, for all our sakes.”

“Well—perhaps they had,” assented Mrs. Salmon with a sigh.

The Reverend Gregory Salmon was following in his son’s track a few minutes afterwards. It

did not take long to discover the young man. Angelo had given up at the second meadow, and was lying full length on the grass, under a big elm-tree, and in company with three thoughtful cows, who had got there also out of the heat of the sun. They moved politely and sedately away as the Master of St. Lazarus arrived, but Angelo did not perceive the movement or the cause of it. He was far gone in his own dream-land, and unaware of the presence of his father. He was face downwards, with his elbows in the grass, and his hands clutching his well-shaven cheeks, and before him lay a purse, bright with steel and gold beads, and which was evidently the object of all his attention and admiration. Romance had opened out to him, when grim Reality threw its shadow across the path of his rejoicing.

“Angelo,” said Mr. Salmon.

“Ah! father, is that you?” said Angelo, sitting up, and quickly putting his purse out of sight.

“Yes, it is I. I have come for a little serious talk with you, my son.”

“Concerning Miss Westbrook?” said Angelo quickly.

“Yes. What made you think so?”

“I don’t know,” answered Angelo; “perhaps because I can’t get her out of my head, and fancy she must be in everybody else’s. I am glad it is about Miss Westbrook.”

“Are you, though?” said the father. “Why?”

“I don’t care to speak about anything, or anyone else.”

The Reverend Gregory Salmon eyed his son doubtfully.

“You will not like my way of speaking of her, perhaps, Angelo,” he said; “but you will not misinterpret my reason for it.”

“I hope not,” answered the son.

“Shall we walk across to the next field?”

“If you like.”

Angelo rose and joined his father.

“Proceed,” said Angelo, with a gravity and firmness for which his sire was wholly unprepared, “and you will be careful what you say, for her sake—and my own.”

CHAPTER III.

THE END OF THE VISIT.

THE Reverend Gregory Salmon and his son Angelo left the shadow of the trees and the society of the cows, for a quiet walk along the banks of the river. There was much for the father to explain, and at the outset there was more difficulty than the senior Mr. Salmon had expected. He was not so sure of his son as he had been half an hour since—or, rather, for the first time in his life he distrusted his influence over a weak and impressionable young man. He began as if he doubted him, and the strength of his own influence together.

“Angelo,” he said, “we have been labouring under a terrible delusion, and I hope you see that as clearly as I do.”

"I do not see anything very terrible at present," answered the son.

"I am dreadfully shocked."

"I was never happier in my life," said Angelo, pressing his hand on his waistcoat pocket, wherein was Mabel's purse, which was as close to his heart as he could get it at present.

"I am talking about Miss Westbrook," said the father sharply.

"So am I."

Mr. Salmon was unprepared for these ready answers, and marvelled what had become of that slow, hesitating manner for which Angelo had been invariably distinguished. He did not affect to be surprised, however, but after a glance askance at his son, went on in the same pompous way.

"I have been having a serious discussion with your mother concerning the fact of Miss Westbrook's loss of fortune—if she ever had any fortune," he added,—“and we have both arrived at the conclusion that it will be infinitely better for the young lady to leave St. Lazarus as soon as possible.”

“Because she is poor?” asked Angelo, with a marked elevation of his eyebrows.

“Because she is a mystery—because we have nothing but her word as to all this.”

“It is enough,” replied Angelo.

“It is not sufficient for me,” said Mr. Salmon sharply. He was an irritable man, and the short, quick responses of his son aggravated as well as perplexed him.

“Miss Westbrook is a guest in your house, father,” Angelo remarked; “and to be treated, I hope, with respect so long as she remains there.”

“Of course, of course,” answered the father, “so long as she remains, I am not likely to forget the courtesy due to a lady who has been invited to my home. There has certainly been an error of judgment, and I take my share of blame. I have been credulous, Angelo—I have believed every word of your statement as to her position in life, just as you believed it before me, and without seeking one atom’s worth of proof, and now we are both trembling on the brink of an abyss!”

Angelo shook his head as he walked by his father's side.

"I don't understand you," he said.

Mr. Salmon fancied that he had impressed his son at last.

"Suppose—I merely say suppose, for the sake of argument, Angelo—that Miss Westbrook is a shrewd, clever, far-seeing woman of the world," he continued; "she meets you in America, hears you are rich, discovers you to be credulous, and lays her plan accordingly. Could she have acted in a deeper way, to enlist our sympathy and gain your admiration?"

"You know I admire her," said Angelo; "I have not attempted to disguise even a stronger feeling than admiration for her, and I—I—I——" he began to grow confused, "I object to any supposition that attempts, for a single moment, to lower Mabel Westbrook in my estimation. There!" he concluded, with an emphatic stamp of his foot on the grass.

"If I put a mild supposition before you, Angelo, you need not fly at me like a bull-dog," said the father, reprovingly.

"I beg your pardon. But—don't say anything against her just now, please."

"Surely it has not gone so far as this? My dear boy, you have not been weak enough to allow Miss Westbrook to anticipate an offer of marriage from you? You have not concealed this from your own father and mother?"

"I have not kept anything from you," said Angelo, moodily; "I have not had the chance."

"Bless me!"

"I have not had the chance of winning the heart of a good woman like Mabel Westbrook," Angelo continued; "I am too weak and poor a fellow—I have nothing to recommend me but my money."

"That is everything to a woman looking out for a husband."

"Which she is not."

"She would not have you if she were rich," said Mr. Salmon, seeing his advantage; "she is too brilliant and sharp a girl—'go-a-head,' they call it in the country from which she has come. She would have had hundreds of admirers if she had been wealthy. You know she would not have had you."

"Yes," said Angelo, very sadly, "I know that."

"And if she accept you for the sake of position—if she has known all along of this blow to her fortune, and has played her cards accordingly, what a miserable life lies before you! The world will not only laugh at you," said the father, "but she will laugh at you too."

"I have been laughed at so often in my life," replied Angelo, "that one more jest will not affect me much. And if it comes from her, I can forgive it."

"Not afterwards—not when time has proved to you what a dupe you have been."

"She will not make a dupe of me," said Angelo—"I wish she would."

"But——"

"But I have received your warning, sir," said Angelo, interrupting him, "and will consider it. I do not think there is anything more for you to say, and I am quite certain there is nothing more which I can hear with any patience."

"Angelo!"

"Therefore you will kindly leave me."

"Certainly. But—but you *are* weak, you know. You will do nothing rashly?"

"I will do nothing rashly," was the echo here.

"Or without consulting me?"

"I will not promise so much as that," said Angelo, "and after all you have said against her."

"I have merely surmised—I know nothing against Miss Westbrook. Until this morning I have never suspected her for an instant."

"She should have been above suspicion always."

Angelo turned abruptly from his father, and went on across the meadows to the country road lying beyond the hedge-rows in the distance. He had promised Mabel that he would take a walk—she had wished to get rid of him that morning, and thought that a stroll would do him good, and he would set about it at once. He wanted time to consider the new position of affairs before Mabel left St. Lazarus, and he wanted that time to himself, and away from his father, whom he left looking after him. Mr. Gregory Salmon made no attempt to follow;

he was wise enough to see the futility of pressing his arguments more closely on his son that day. They would have their weight in due course, for Angelo was mild and tractable, and there was no necessity for haste now. Angelo was walking steadily from home and Mabel Westbrook, and was comparatively safe in consequence. What might happen before he was back to luncheon, who could tell?

If the Master of St. Lazarus had already sketched forth a programme in his mind, it was disposed of by a prompter course of action on the part of the lady principally concerned. As he walked across the quadrangle, he saw that Mabel's boxes were at the front door, and that Hodsman the porter was bringing round a barrow for them. The Brethren of the Noble Poor, interested in the flitting, had collected in a group upon the grass to talk of it, like a wheezy chorus in an ancient play. Much of the history of Adam Halfday's life and death had found its way to his old companions, and the American girl's connection with the story had afforded food for comment here. The loss of her fortune was not known to these old men, who

had learned to regard Mabel with awe and admiration as a guardian genius of St. Lazarus, who might benefit each brother in his turn. At the outer gates, Miss Westbrook's hired carriage stopped the way, and in the carriage Dorcas—who had accompanied Mabel to the Hospital—waited for her patroness, and was stolid and reflective.

Mr. Salmon passed into the house, and found Mabel Westbrook equipped for travelling, and sitting by the side of his better half, who had been evidently weeping.

Mabel met him with a bright smile as he entered. This was very pleasant. She was parting amicably. Mrs. Salmon had managed a delicate piece of business with considerable judgment.

"I could not leave St. Lazarus without bidding you good-bye, Mr. Salmon, and thanking you for all your hospitality," said Mabel, as he entered.

"Going to leave us!" replied Mr. Salmon, with an affectation of surprise that was very badly done.

"Somewhat unceremoniously, perhaps," said

Mabel; "but I have been here under false pretences, as I have been telling this good friend of mine, who begs me to remain."

"Does she, though—dear me," ejaculated the Master. "Well, we shall have luncheon in half-an-hour," he added with a dash; "you will not go till then?"

"I should have waited till your return, Mr. Salmon, and only till your return," was Mabel's answer. "I have said good-bye to this lady and your son."

"Have you seen Angelo?" exclaimed the Master.

"Mine was a farewell in disguise to him," said Mabel, "and I think it was as well. He will not judge me harshly for leaving without the formality of an adieu. Remember me to him, please," she added, as she turned to the mother and rested her hand upon her shoulder.

"I wish you would not go away so suddenly—as if—as if we had done something to offend you," said the Master's wife. "Mr. Salmon, this is quite a voluntary act of Mabel's, I have not said a word to her."

"Why should you?" answered Mabel. "Is

it likely that you would so quickly after my misfortunes, as the world will term them presently. No, no, I give you credit for more kindness and charity, although it is my duty none the less to take the initiative."

"You have acted with great decision of character, Miss Westbrook," said Mr. Salmon; "and have certainly surprised us. But it may be for the best. Considering all things, I cannot blame you very much for the step which you have taken."

"Considering all things, no," said Mabel, thoughtfully.

Mr. Gregory Salmon blushed; but she was not thinking of him.

"Had I been prepared for so complete a collapse of my property," added Mabel, in conclusion, "I should have stayed away from a place which you were kind enough to press me to call home. But I was waiting for some portion of the wreck to drift to shore."

"It is a very terrible blow to you," said Mr. Salmon.

Mabel laughed so pleasantly that Mr. Salmon regarded her for a moment with amazement.

"Not at all," she said; "I never cared for money. It would not have done me any good, or brought me one true friend. Good-bye, Mr. Salmon, and once more—thank you."

Gregory Salmon felt a small-souled individual as he took the little hand of his guest in his and bowed over it politely. He was glad she was going, but he was more glad that it was of her own free will, and at no hint from his wife.

"Good-bye, Miss Westbrook, if you are really determined to depart so hastily," he said.

"Yes, quite determined."

"And you will return to—Penton, perhaps?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Mabel; "I shall make up my mind as I go along."

She stooped and kissed Mrs. Salmon, and then went away from St. Lazarus; and the brethren doffed their caps in mute respect to her as she passed them with a smile and friendly nod of farewell.

One brother of the Noble Poor who had held aloof from the rest Mabel discovered at the carriage door, talking energetically to Dorcas,

and shaking his head with more vehemence than seemed necessary. This was Peter Scone, the senior member of the fraternity.

"She is a cross-grained vixen, my lady, Heaven knows that!" he said, as if in explanation of his excitement.

"I don't believe it, Mr. Scone," answered Mabel, cheerfully.

"She will not tell me where you both are going," he said.

"Is it necessary?"

"It may be some day," he replied evasively; "it may be very soon. Will you read this as you go along, please?"

He thrust a torn scrap of paper into her hands, and tottered away under the archway of the Cardinal's Tower, like a man in great haste to get from her. Mabel entered the carriage, and turned her back upon the Hospital of St. Lazarus for good; her new life lay beyond it—strange and unknown and incomprehensible,—but there was no shadow of it on her fair young face.

CHAPTER IV.

ANGELO SEEKS ADVICE.

THE Penton Museum had been closed to the general public some two hours or more, and its curator had dismissed the last official—a certain Mrs. Ironbrace, whose mission was to dust and wash and scrub at the corporate expense, and to do generally for Mr. Halfday,—when the noisy bell of the establishment announced a visitor. On that particular evening Brian had settled down to work; there were more papers than usual on the table of his room, the lamp had been carefully trimmed, and set on the right side of his desk; the desk was open, and Brian was writing busily, covering many pages of foolscap with a thick and

almost illegible scrawl, when the summons from without disturbed the flow of his ideas. Brian Halfday set his pen aside and listened. He was unprepared for visitors; he had considered himself a man without any friends beyond his book-shelves before Mabel Westbrook came to England; he had been reserved, austere, and studious to a degree that had aged and ossified him; and there had been so few calls at the Museum after business hours, that a ring at the bell came as a novelty and a surprise. Still he was a man who had been long ago prepared for emergencies—one who knew the value of time, and had made his arrangements accordingly. Servantless, with a horror of office-keepers and charwomen, he had arranged, after Dorcas had resigned her post as housekeeper to him, and gone to St. Lazarus to nurse her grandfather, a system of communication with the outside world, when occasions like the present necessitated a parley with it. He did not move from his seat, but blew an inquiry as to who was there down a pipe which passed from his room to the side of the street-door, a few inches above the bell.

By means of this acoustic arrangement, the gentleman waiting on the top step for admittance was suddenly surprised by a hoarse bellowing close to his ears.

"Who is it?—what do you want?" were the muffled words that issued through the mouth-piece.

The gentleman regained his composure, and called forth the nature of his business up the tube in reply.

"My name is Angelo Salmon; I wish to speak to Mr. Halfday for a few minutes."

"All right," answered Brian; "I will come down."

Angelo waited patiently until the door was opened in due course by the curator, who came on the step and glared into the young man's face with eagerness.

"Is anything the matter?" he exclaimed.

"I have news for you, Mr. Halfday."

"Bad news?"

"It is bad news to me, at all events."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," said Brian, abruptly; "I was afraid Miss Westbrook had sent you."

"No ; but Miss Westbrook left us this morning."

"Where has she gone? Why have I not been told of this before? What is the reason of it?" asked Brian.

"I shall be most happy to explain ; but it is rather a long story, and I have come for your advice, Mr. Halfday."

"Well, well," said Brian, impatiently, "begin, please."

"On the doorstep? You will excuse me, Mr. Halfday, but I thought that——"

"Will you step inside?"

"Thank you, I think I will."

"I am busy to-night—I had set myself a long task," said Brian, "and you interfere with it. There, I am discourteous—but don't mind me."

"Oh! I don't mind you in the least now, Mr. Halfday," said Angelo, as he stepped into the hall. Brian closed the door, and turned round sharply, with his hand on the lock.

"Why not *now*?" he asked.

"I have heard so much of you lately from Miss Westbrook."

"Has she not had anything better to talk about than such a bad-tempered fellow as I am?" asked Brian, thoughtfully, and yet gratefully.

"She misunderstood you cruelly, she tells me—and she has so high an opinion of you at present that I am in duty bound to follow suit."

"You are extremely obliging," said Brian, drily. "Miss Westbrook's opinions influence yours, then?"

"I am proud to say so."

"Haven't you any opinions of your own?"

"Not any—worth mentioning," Angelo added, after a few moments' consideration.

"Is that why you have come for mine?" asked Brian, in his usual quick manner of pitching one question after another at a listener.

"Partly, sir, I must confess."

"My opinions are utterly worthless, I am beginning to consider," said Brian, bitterly, "my knowledge of the world is a snare, and my estimate of human character a delusion. You must not rely on me in any way."

"Mabel Westbrook said, only a little while

ago to me—the day before yesterday, in fact—that if ever I was beset by doubt or difficulty, I could not do a wiser thing than come to you for advice. So I have come !”

“The lady does me a high honour,” murmured Brian ; “but she has proceeded to extremes in her kind estimate of me. This is a mental re-action for thinking me a scamp. Presently she will judge me as I am. Will you follow me ?”

“I thank you.”

Brian Halfday led the way to his room, as a few weeks ago he had led the way for her who had been lately speaking in his praise. His irritable mood had vanished, as if by magic, beneath the spell of the few words that Angelo Salmon had addressed to him without any thought of flattery. He was glad to receive his visitor now ; he should hear a great deal of Mabel Westbrook, and of all that had happened during the last ten days ; and work was not so pleasant a thing as it had seemed half-an-hour ago. He placed a chair for his guest, packed away his papers in his desk, and then sat down with his hands clasped upon it, after a habit of

his when awakening to interest in passing things.

"In what way can I be of use to you, Mr. Salmon?" he asked.

"You will give me a little time to collect myself, I hope," said Angelo, as he seated himself, and put his hat on the table at his side. "I have not that gift of dashing off-hand at a subject which appears to distinguish you, Mr. Halfday. I am very slow. Excuse me."

"Take your own time," said our hero. "I am in no hurry."

"Thank you," said Angelo again.

Brian Halfday watched his visitor attentively, whilst he waited for the communication that Angelo had resolved to give him at his leisure. He even regarded Angelo Salmon with a strange, pitying kind of interest, as if the young man's weakness or nervousness had aroused his sympathy as well as his curiosity. He thought, even, that it was not difficult to guess what was at the bottom of Angelo's thoughts to unnerve him in this way. He had sketched that idea faintly in his mind a few weeks since, and thought something of the kind might

come to pass ; still not so soon as this, or in this odd fashion.

Angelo thought out the position at his leisure. He took his time, as Brian Halfday had suggested ; and it was a quarter of an hour at least before he burst forth with—

“Mr. Halfday, I have had a few words with my father.”

Brian’s face, which had certainly betrayed anxiety, brightened up at this statement.

“Sons have done so before you, and been sorry for it,” answered the curator. “When the father is a good man, and the son honest and straightforward, the difference between them is easily adjusted.”

“He says he will never forgive me. He——”

“For what offence?”

“You will excuse me, I know, Mr. Halfday ; but I shall never get on unless you allow me to tell the story in my own way,” remonstrated Angelo. “You pull me up suddenly, and disturb my ideas.”

“Go on,” said Brian. “I will try and not interrupt you again. But you are terribly slow,” he muttered.

"Father and I quarrelled about Miss Westbrook."

"About her! Then she——Pray proceed," said Brian, as Angelo raised his hand deprecatingly.

"She has left the Hospital for good, as I was about to explain when you broke in again," said Angelo. "The news came to-day——"

"Ha! to-day?"

"Yes, I said to-day," Angelo continued, "that the news came of the total loss of her property; and she bore up like the brave woman that she is. My own private opinion, Mr. Halfday, is, she does not care a bit."

"She is careless as regards money," said Brian. "A more reckless woman in money matters I have never met. If she had been less hasty—if—but I interrupt you again."

"Yes, you do," said Angelo in assent. "Let me see, what was I saying last? Oh! the news came of the loss of her property, in a bank of which her father was a principal shareholder. I was deeply distressed, Mr. Halfday."

"Very likely."

"And I think Miss Mabel saw it," he con-

tinued. "She advised me to take a walk—she gave me a little silk purse which she had been making for me at the time, but I—I did not think it was a parting gift."

His voice broke suddenly, and went off into a cracked falsetto.

"I am very childish," he said apologetically.

"Not a doubt of it," replied Brian, "go on."

"When I returned from my walk she had left St. Lazarus for ever," concluded Angelo.

"They had sent her away—your people," said Brian scornfully, "or they had said something hurtful to her pride, and she resented it by leaving them at once. I do not blame her."

"Nothing was said, Mr. Halfday," said Angelo; "they gave me their word of honour that Miss Westbrook left of her own free will, and with many thanks and best wishes to them both."

"What did you and your father quarrel about?" asked Brian doubtfully.

"That is the question I am coming to—though it was hardly a quarrel. A few words, I said, if you remember."

"Yes," said Brian wearily.

"I was overcome at Miss Westbrook's sudden departure—I even shed a few tears in my distress—and I told them, what they knew before, and had seemed glad to know then; what I am too proud to disguise in any way from any living man!" cried Angelo enthusiastically.

"What is that?"

"Oh! Mr. Halfday, can't you guess?" said Angelo, colouring.

"You love this American lady?"

"Yes—that's it."

"Ah!" said Brian, mournfully, "that's it!"

"You cannot imagine what a dear, tender-hearted, clever, lovable girl she is!" Angelo continued.

"Yes—I think I can," was the response.

"What a——"

"And Mr. Gregory Salmon?—he was surprised at your confession. Go on with your love story. It is becoming interesting."

"My father was very much surprised and shocked, he said," replied Angelo. "He had no idea that my feelings had become engaged so seriously, he said too. He was amazed at my

thinking deeply of a young person—he called her a young person—who, upon her own showing, was not worth a penny in the world, and of whose character and antecedents I had not had a fair opportunity of judging. He said——”

“Yes, yes—I know what a careful man like him would say,” interrupted Brian again, “and he is right enough, after the fashion of the world to which he belongs. What did you say—who are less conventional?”

“That I would marry Miss Westbrook tomorrow, if she would have me,” replied Angelo—“that I felt it my duty to seek her out at once, and offer her my hand and heart, so that she should not think her loss of fortune had in any way made a difference in me.”

“What did Mr. Salmon senior say to that?”

“That I was a fool,” answered Angelo with excitement, “and my grandmother was a fool—that is his own mother, mind you!—to leave me all this money to throw away on the first woman who chose to flatter me. As if money had ever done me any good!—as if I would not be only too happy to lay it at Ma-

bel's feet and beg her to take care of it and me!"

"Yes, yes—but don't talk of your money," said Brian, "especially to so proud a woman as Mabel Westbrook. Money has been her trouble up to this day's date, not her consolation. You cannot bribe her into marriage with you."

"I should be sorry to think I could," answered Angelo.

"What do you want with me?" asked Brian, after a few minutes' silence, during which he had been brooding very deeply—"in what way do you imagine I can help you?"

"She has great faith in you."

Brian shook his head.

"I scarcely believe it," he said, "and, at the best, faith is quickly disturbed."

"She has said so often that I needed a friend to keep me strong by his advice and example, that, missing her suddenly, I came to you at once."

"You are very kind."

"For you *are* strong, and I—I can't help being weak."

"Your love for Mabel Westbrook is not weak?"

"Oh, no."

"That should give you strength, and teach you the right way to act, without coming here for advice that I do not care to offer you. That I will not offer you!" he shouted at his visitor.

"God bless me!—why not?" exclaimed Angelo.

The astonishment on the face of the last speaker recalled Brian Halfday to himself.

"My advice brings ill-luck," he replied, in a different and calmer tone; "I can't look back and see where it has been of profit to my fellow-creatures, where it has been often followed or cared for. I have a hard way of telling plain truths, a rough manner of pointing out what I may consider the right course; and hence I have made many enemies, and not one friend."

"Miss Westbrook is your friend, I am sure."

"I am grateful for her good opinion of me, but I cannot consider her my friend," said Brian, "and I dare not think of her too much," he added in a lower tone.

"I do not follow you," said Angelo politely.

"As for my advice, unless it suited with your inclination, you would not follow it," Brian continued.

"I am sure you would advise me for the best."

"I might say, 'Give up all thought of Mabel Westbrook'—what then?"

"I could not do that," said Angelo alarmed ;
"you would never advise me to do that, surely?"

"You are not good enough for her."

"I own it—I am proud to own it."

"You have scarcely an idea in common with her," Brian went on ; "she is above you in mind and education, and must infallibly look down upon you. She is strong, and you are weak—she is a woman, and you are a child."

"I do not wish to be anything but her slave. And I shall love her all my life, sir."

Angelo's voice broke again, and he leaned forward eagerly, as if to reason down Brian's estimate of the position which he had set before him. There were tears in the weak man's eyes, but the strength of the passion at his

heart had forced them there to make the child of him which Brian had just said that he was. He had only one excuse—his love. That was pure and childlike, and beat down the hard logic of his companion.

“You can do no more than love her all your life,” said Brian, sorrowfully; “tell her so, and win her. A woman is only ungrateful to true affection when she is no true woman.”

“I am extremely obliged to you for that advice, Mr. Halfday—and you really think I may win her for a wife?”

“It is possible,” answered Brian.

“I was afraid I had not half a chance; but you give me courage somehow. I am so very glad I called,” he added.

“Have you any clue to find Miss Westbrook?”

“I can find her very easily.”

“My sister Dorcas is with her still?”

“Yes.”

“Dorcas will have to return here, and be housekeeper once more,” murmured Brian; “the old life, and the old quarrels from which Mabel Westbrook might have saved her, perhaps, at

some cost to herself. Though I did not advise her—though I warned her in every way in my power.”

Angelo Salmon did not reply to this—the words were not intended for his hearing, and he took no heed of them. He had no interest in anything that did not immediately refer to Mabel Westbrook, with whom his thoughts were bound up heart and soul.

Suddenly Angelo started to his feet, and put his hat on the back of his head.

“If you don’t mind my leaving you, I will go to her at once.”

“I don’t mind,” said Brian, sarcastically again.

“I had better strike whilst the iron is hot. Tell her the whole truth simply and plainly, and that I never thought for an instant of her money when my heart turned towards her as a flower to the sun.”

Brian gave a spasmodic laugh at this.

“Poor sunflower!” he said, arranging his papers; “if you can find your way downstairs without an escort, I shall be obliged to you.”

"I shall be able to let myself out," said Angelo; "and you will allow me to say again that I am extremely indebted to you."

"For what?"

"For your encouragement to persevere—to tell her my love outright and win her. 'Win her,' you said!"

"Have I said as much as that?" returned Brian, half absently. "Have I told you to save her with your wealth from the poverty of which she does not dream—to give an honest man's love, home, and protection to a woman who is singularly alone, and who has met with singular misfortunes? I have said all this—advised all this, then, after all?"

"Yes. Don't you think I——"

"There, there, seek her out and prove to her that friends are not eager to desert her because the money is flown," said Brian, irritably; "under any circumstances your friendship or love will not do her any harm. Stay."

Angelo paused at the door.

"Would her rejection of your suit do any harm to you?" asked Brian. "You are not a strong man, and it is to be considered."

"I hardly expect to be accepted, all at once," said Angelo, modestly.

"To be taken by instalments, as the robbers took her grandfather's bank-shares?" suggested Brian.

"I am not going to act rashly," replied Angelo, shivering at the idea of any undue precipitation; "I am going to ask for hope—to tell her the state of my feelings, and to leave hers to—to—to grow towards me in good time; as they will, I trust, when she is convinced mine are deep and lasting. How dreadfully close your room is, Mr. Halfday! I declare I feel faint with the heat!"

"You have been talking yourself into a fever, like a fool!" said Brian, roughly again; "upon second consideration, I will see you safe to the street."

"Thank you. I might lose myself in the rooms below—I—would you mind my taking your arm?" said Angelo.

"No; lean on me. Have you dined?"

"Yes."

"Have you drunk much wine at dinner?" Brian asked, curiously.

"I have drunk nothing but water to-day. Why, you don't think——"

"No, I don't think that now—excuse the question," said Brian,—“but your legs are unsteady.”

"It's my natural emotion; my knees are perfectly uncontrollable when anything serious affects me, and this, you see, is a crisis in my life—a great crisis, which you do not seem to understand."

"Yes, yes, I understand you very clearly," answered Brian; "but, after all, it is no business of mine."

"And does not affect you—I know that, Mr. Halfday; but still I thought you would be interested, in some degree, in the step I am taking."

"In some degree I am. This way."

Brian and his visitor went downstairs to the great hall, where Brian opened the door and let in the night air and the light of the stars.

"It's a beautiful night," said Angelo. "Will you wish me 'God speed' before I start?"

"If for the best, and for Miss Westbrook's sake, I wish it," answered Brian.

"Thank you. And if, before I go, you will let me call you friend, and consider you my friend from this hour, I should be glad," Angelo said, with great earnestness.

"I never make friends," said Brian, more gloomily than churlishly.

"I am not a bad companion when I am understood thoroughly."

"Probably not; but I shall be always companionless."

"It must be dull work for you," was the quaint response.

"I have my studies—my books; I am never alone."

"But as you grow older——"

"Good night; it is getting late," said Brian.

Angelo took the hint, and went down the steps, after shaking hands with the curator of the Museum, who lingered at the door watching him until his figure was lost in the night mists.

"And I have let him go to her, with his simple heart, his truth, and his money!—I have wished him 'God speed'!" muttered Brian. "Well, well, it is surely for the best; and if she thinks so too, I shall not mind."

He stepped back with his hand upon the door, which he was closing softly, when some one from without pushed it gently inwards. Brian stood aside, offering no opposition, and a man, whom he recognized immediately, shrank, rather than came, into the hall, and glanced furtively from beneath his hat at the curator. It was the man who had broken his word to him at Datchet Bridge—the father who had betrayed him on that night, as he had betrayed him years ago, when Dorcas and he were little children.

“Brian,” said the new-comer, in a husky voice.

“You are not wanted here. You have no business with honest men,” said Brian, sternly; “your way lies beyond this house, where I will not have you stay.”

“Pray let me come in. Don’t treat me badly; I don’t mean badly by you—I don’t indeed,” urged Mr. Halfday senior.

“I have done with you,” was the firm reply.

“I have come on particular business—private and confidential, Brian,—and I want your advice very badly.”

“More advice,” said Brian, shrugging his shoulders.

“It’s about that money of Miss Westbrook’s. Something has happened since I saw you last. I don’t know what to do.”

CHAPTER V.

“BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION.”

MISS WESTBROOK'S name acted like a charm upon Brian Halfday. In all that appertained to her, or seemed likely to affect her, he set aside his sterner self, or that sterner will belonging to him. As long as she lived—this ill-treated lady, beggared by error and miscalculation, should have his sympathy and watchful care. He closed the door, and regarded his father with a keener scrutiny. Mr. Halfday senior was not looking much better in health; he was still waxen and angular of face and feature, and that palsied movement of the hands to which attention has been directed, was strikingly apparent in the

first moments of the interview. He had been uncertain of the nature of his welcome; he had been afraid of Brian, and it had been a struggle with his nerves—fortified even by pale brandy—to face him again, despite the necessity which had taken his steps to the Museum.

“What has happened that you come to me?” asked Brian; “what of this money for which you cast me off for ever?”

“Not for ever, Brian. Don’t speak so cruelly to your own father—I can’t bear it—really!”

“Yes, the man is my own father,” muttered Brian. “Heaven help him and me, in its good time!”

“Amen to that, Brian. For if we stand by each other, and help each other——”

“What do you want?” cried Brian fiercely; “state your business, and be as brief as you can. And remember this,” he added, advancing so quickly towards his father that Mr. Halfday senior backed against the door, “that I do not trust you, and nothing you can say or do will make me trust you again.”

“Not when I have placed my whole confidence in you?” said the father.

“No.”

“Yes, you will. You will see then I mean well—and have always meant well by my fellow-creatures. But are we going to talk in this place?”

Brian reflected for a moment.

“You can follow me to my room, if you like,” said he.

“I think it will be better.”

They went upstairs to the curator’s apartment, where for the second time that night a visitor was shown.

“You have a snug berth here, Brian,” said Mr. Halfday, seating himself in the chair which Angelo Salmon had previously occupied, “and here you would have taken care of me, I dare-say, until I had had time to turn round. I did not like to feel dependent upon you, Brian, for I am naturally a proud man. It is in our family, that kind of feeling—your poor grandfather was proud—but though you have misjudged me, I acted with the best of motives. I was not going to desert you or Dorcas—my own children—God forbid that such a thought should enter my head!”

"What brings you here?" asked Brian, unmoved by this half protest, and half apology.

"I kept you in remembrance, Brian. I sent you a letter."

"A lawyer's letter—yes."

"It was formal, but it was my solicitor's wish it should be so, and I was entirely in the hands of my solicitor. I hope, my dear boy," he said, with extreme anxiety, "you have not taken offence at it?"

"Tell me what you want with me," said Brian; "these papers may give you a hint that I am pressed for time to-night."

"I have no wish to take up your time unnecessarily," answered the father, "only I thought a few preliminary remarks might set us on a better footing. For you *are* aggrieved?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry—it is not my fault. I could not trust you all at once, it was not natural. Comparatively speaking, you were a stranger to me, and we met in the dark, and in a high wind. To expect a sudden burst of confidence under those conditions was scarcely to be expected."

Brian sat down before his desk and took up his old position, with his thin hands clasped together on the papers with which it was covered. He did not interrupt his father in the profuse explanation which was proffered him; but when it was completed, his sole reply was a fixed stare that was not pleasant to encounter. Mr. Halfday looked away, and coughed behind his claw-like fingers; he writhed perceptibly on his chair, and began to shake with his old nervousness.

"But these are mere words, not deeds, you will think," he continued, after waiting for the answer that never came, "and we are not getting on rapidly with the business of the evening."

"We are not," assented his son.

"Concerning this money, then, which was deposited by Miss Westbrook to the account of Adam Halfday, you are angry with me because I claim it as heir-at-law?"

"It was deposited by mistake. It was not money belonging to my grandfather, I have told you," said Brian.

“Had I not come back to England, *you* would have claimed the money?”

“Yes, and restored it to its rightful owner.”

“I am a man of the world, and understand human nature—you would have been its rightful owner, and no one else,” said Mr. Halfday. “Miss Westbrook must have been pretty sure to whom the cash belonged when she paid it into Penton Bank.”

“Will you oblige me by not mentioning Miss Westbrook’s name again?” said Brian, emphatically.

“You began it, not I. I have no wish to mention it.”

“And will you tell me what you want with me?”

“Certainly; I have come for that express purpose, but the matter is a delicate one, and should be approached by degrees, as we do not seem to understand each other.”

“We do not—we never shall.”

“If I knew you a little better,” said the father, regretfully, “we should get on comfortably together. Over a glass or two of grog, now, and a good cigar, we might sink our small

differences, and become father and son in real earnest. I don't want to run in opposition to you—I want to work with you, upon my soul, I do !”

This William Halfday was not a deep man, and the little cunning that was in him was of a flimsy type, that lowered him without concealing his real nature. He had been unsuccessful all his life from sheer lack of brains, which failed him at the present crisis as they had many times before.

“Proceed,” said Brian, as he paused ; “I am listening attentively to your arguments.”

“Since we parted, I have been making inquiries about you,” the father continued, “as it was my duty to do before I acted blindly on the various instructions which you gave me at Datchet Bridge. You asked for my whole confidence too quickly, too peremptorily, if you remember?”

Brian nodded his head. To answer the question would have been to lose time in arriving at the motive for this man's visit to him.

“My solicitor thought it would be wise of

me to prosecute a few investigations, and he instituted inquiries on his own account, and in the interest of his client."

Brian nodded again, as if he admired his father's caution, and had nothing to say against the means which had been adopted to discover his true character.

"And we have heard nothing to your disadvantage, Brian," said Mr. Halfday; "you are known all over Penton as a long-headed man, with a faculty for figures, and as hard a fellow at driving a bargain as any in the city. You have saved money and invested money cleverly—you are fond of money."

"I am fond of money," echoed Brian, breaking silence at last—"yes."

"All right, then. We shall get on famously together. Suppose, now"—he leaned forward, and began to shake more vigorously as he approached the subject which had brought him there—"I offer to share this legacy with you—to give you one fair half of all we may obtain by acting together in concert—shoulder to shoulder, you know—would you not say I was honest in the matter?"

"If you could do without my help, I should say you were liberal," replied Brian, somewhat enigmatically, "and if you require it, I should think you were politic."

Mr. Halfday considered the reply before he said suddenly,

"Yes, I require it."

"I thought so."

"Without we help each other," said Mr. Halfday, "this money will be lost to the two of us—we shall not get a penny of it—and I may be a clog upon you for the remainder of your days."

"I see," said Brian with another of his emphatic nods, "it is halves, or nothing."

"That is exactly the position."

"Did your solicitor suggest this amicable arrangement between us?" asked Brian.

"He has not the slightest idea there is any hitch in the matter. He believes everything is going on smoothly and successfully towards my prosperity—and I dare not tell him a single word."

"He would be shocked, perhaps?"

"He would pretend to be shocked," was the

reply; "I don't believe in the fine feelings of man or woman—it's all affectation, Brian."

"That is your creed?"

"Yes—absolutely mine. I have found out too many of my species in my time, to believe in one of them," he said conceitedly; "there is not a man without his price, it's the same all over the world—trust me as a great traveller and a shrewd observer, Brian. I know it."

"And you have found out that my price for helping you to secure the money, and to stamp underfoot remorselessly all opposition to its acquirement, is ten thousand pounds?"

"Yes, I have found out that," said the other laughing, "you hid yourself well behind the heroics, but the touch of gold brought you to earth."

"Ten thousand pounds is a sum worth having," said Brian.

"It is a fortune to you."

"And may make another fortune, with care. I am glad you have come," said Brian, "I think we will have a glass of grog and a cigar before we proceed further into the affair,—what say you?"

“With all my heart.”

Brian put his papers into his desk, which he locked and set aside, and placed on the table in its stead a decanter, two glasses, and a box of cigars. His whole manner had changed within the last few minutes, and Mr. Halfday, watching him furtively, congratulated himself on stripping from his son the disguise which had perplexed him. Here was Brian Halfday his true self at last!—it would have been very odd to find him different from the rest of the family, it would have been absolutely unnatural.

Brian walked about the room singing wild snatches of song indicative of the high spirits to which his father's communication had raised him; he mixed the brandy and water with a smiling countenance above the grog-glasses—he pushed the cigars towards his companion, and was particular in selecting one for himself, which he lighted with all the care and attention peculiar to a man who smokes his life away.

“Now, to business again,” he said, dropping into an easy-chair and stretching his legs to

their full length, "it is consolatory to think we understand each other at last."

"You said we never should," replied the father.

"I did not know you were going to treat me so handsomely, *mon père*."

"Ah! you did not know who was your best friend?"

"No."

"Or give him credit for having a little of the family shrewdness?"

"Not an atom's worth."

"Well, here's your health, Brian—your very good health," said Mr. Halfday, lifting up his glass.

"And yours," responded Brian, as he imitated his father's example.

The two men drank, the elder in a practised manner, which tilted the contents at once out of sight; and then they faced each other again, both smiling and genial—sire and son united after years of silence and distrust between them—a strange sight for the gods!

"Now, Brian," said William Halfday when

he had set his glass down, "the real fact of the case is that your grandfather Adam did not die without a will."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAILURE OF THE MISSION.

BRIAN HALFDAY took the cigar from his mouth, to breathe more freely after this announcement. It was a momentary spasm of surprise, for he said very calmly the instant afterwards—

“Yes, that makes a difference in the position, certainly. Where is the will?”

“Ah! that is what I want you to find out.”

“That is my share of the work for a share of the plunder,” said Brian, “if you will excuse my calling it plunder in the excitement of the moment.”

“I don’t mind what you call it, so that the money gets into our hands.”

"I suppose not. And the lawyer is not aware of a will?"

"He has not the slightest idea," replied the father.

"Who told you anything about it?"

"Peter Scone—one of the brotherhood—an old man who was once cashier in the firm of Westbrook and Halfday."

"I know him," said Brian, thoughtfully; "but he may be dreaming of all this—he is in his dotage."

"He is the cunningest old fox that ever existed!" cried Mr. Halfday; "why that man did not make a fortune in his day I cannot conceive."

"When did he tell you?—how was it that you met him?" said Brian, with his old rapidity of utterance; "go on—this is serious."

"Ah! by Heaven, it is, Brian."

"We must do something—and that quickly."

"Ay—we must."

"Well, well," said Brian, impatiently, "get on with the story, and then we shall see how to act."

"Do you mind my helping myself to half a

glass more of your brandy?—it steadies my nerves; and you have probably observed an awkward habit I have of trembling like an aspen.”

“Drink away,” said Brian, carelessly.

Mr. Halfday mixed his second glass of spirits and water whilst Brian looked gravely at him.

“Shall I mix for you also?” asked the father.

“Not now—presently.”

“As you please.”

Mr. Halfday drank deeply, set his glass aside, and recommenced.

“You must know, my dear boy,” he said very confidentially now, “that when it struck me I might require proofs of identification, I wrote to Peter Scone. He met me in the city, and we had a few words at first—not many—about a trifling and ridiculous loan which he had once advanced. I told him he should have the money with ample interest to boot, and that appeased him. He remembered me as William Halfday very clearly, and, provided his expenses were paid, was prepared to swear to me in any court of law in the United Kingdom.”

“And this will?”

“Don’t be in a hurry, my dear boy,” continued Mr. Halfday, “he did not tell me anything about the will then; but a few days afterwards he came to me again, and in an artful, roundabout way that disgusted me, he let out he remembered Adam Halfday’s making a will a few weeks before he died. He remembered witnessing it with another brother—and Adam’s hiding it away somewhere in the church of the Hospital, where Peter Scone thought he *might* find it, if he were paid well for his trouble. Otherwise he fancied his memory might fail him at the last. Oh! that man’s an awful humbug, Brian!”

“How much does he want?”

“Five hundred pounds if he should be lucky enough to find it.”

“Does he know the contents of the will?”

“Oh! yes, he knows—it is easily guessed at, he says, and I say so too. We are both out of the reckoning, that’s certain.”

“Both of us. That is bad,” said Brian.

“Devilish bad.”

“Then it is Dorcas, whom he did not love a great deal, and to whom he was always as hard

and uncharitable as—I was,” mused Brian.

“Yes—Dorcas—as if she could not wait until her poor old father’s death,” whimpered Mr. Halfday, “before superseding him in this way.”

“Dorcas!” said Brian again, “into whose hands next is this accursed money to pass?”

“Don’t curse the money, Brian,” implored his father; “it is profanity to go on like that. It is not business.”

“It must be Dorcas,” said Brian to himself—
“and there is more misery ahead of us.”

“Misery!” cried the father, catching at the word. “I should rather think there was, unless we can raise—I mean, you can raise—five hundred pounds to pay this cormorant; and then no one need know about the will.”

“Why did Adam Halfday make this will at all?” said Brian.

“You offended your grandfather one day—”

“I was always offending him.”

“And he had saved a little money,” continued the father—“he had scraped together, as you know yourself, some seventy pounds. He thought you wanted it, or had some idea he had saved it, and he swore to Peter Scone

that you should not be the better for his death by a single penny. He made a will, and Peter Scone and one of the brethren, since deceased, were the witnesses to the document."

"So Peter Scone says?"

"Oh, it's true enough," groaned the father; "it's no use building on the hope that Peter has told a lie."

"He can be compelled to give up the will," said Brian.

"By law, you mean? But then that will not suit our book."

"Ah! I had forgotten we do not benefit by the document."

"Besides, Scone does not own to possessing it—swears he has it not,—but thinks he may be able to find it," said the father. "I have told you this before—how dull you are!"

"Yes," assented Brian, "I am very dull."

"Take some brandy," he said, stretching out his hand for the decanter; "I always find that brandy——"

Brian had risen and set the decanter out of his father's reach.

"No more in this house," said Brian, "or

you will go reeling to your home, babbling your wretched secrets to anyone who cares to listen."

"I am not such a fool as that," replied Mr. Halfday.

"You are not wise," said Brian, contemptuously, "or you might have discovered I was the last man whom you could trust."

"I trust you because it is your interest to help me."

"I have no interest in the matter."

"That's a cool remark, Brian," said the father, "when you have just agreed to——"

"Nothing, Mr. Halfday. Pray do not misunderstand me."

"But you will raise this five hundred pounds?"

"It may be a sum beyond my power to raise for any honest purpose—I shall not attempt the experiment in order to bribe that poor old rascal at St. Lazarus," said Brian.

"You foolish fellow! don't you see it puts ten thousand pounds in your pockets?"

"And in yours—and I don't want you to have ten thousand pounds."

"You will never betray my confidence?"

said the father, beginning to tremble once more. "I have put my whole trust in you, Brian."

"Finding it difficult to discover a confederate elsewhere, you come to me," said Brian, "and I have to meet deceit with deceit to get at your vile plans."

"Hard names to your own father. This is 'sharper than a serpent's tooth'—considerably sharper," said Mr. Halfday, abjectly.

"The money is safer in Dorcas's hands than in yours."

"The will may not be found."

"It shall be found," said Brian, decisively.

"I am sorry you should see it in this light," continued the father. "I don't mean anyone harm, for, of course, I should remember Dorcas, who would not have been put in the will if your grandfather had known I was alive. He was always particularly fond of me."

"He always spoke of you as a scamp," answered Brian.

"Ah! that was his facetious way. He called me a young scamp when I was two years old, but he never meant anything by it."

Brian looked at his watch.

"I have no more time to spare," he said, bluntly.

Mr. Halfday senior took the hint, and rose. When he was standing before Brian, twirling his hat nervously in his hands, he said,

"All that I have said, Brian, is in the strictest confidence."

"I am bound to no promise."

"I have told you the whole truth, thinking you would see the matter in the same light as myself," Mr. Halfday continued, "and you were acting all the time."

"Not all the time."

"You led me to think I might put faith in you—you did indeed."

"Did you put faith in me when you came to Datchet Bridge?" asked Brian sternly.

"You frightened me then—it was meeting a stranger and expecting perfect confidence at once—it was natural I should be upon my guard," was the reply. "But now, Brian—now I have made inquiries and found how good and earnest and strong-minded and careful a fellow you are, I——"

“I will hear no more,” shouted Brian, as he sprang to his feet; “I will bear with you no more. Do your worst, or best, I am opposed to you; you are a villain, and had hoped to find your likeness in the son you ran away from. Now, sir, let me see you from this house for ever.”

The man cowered at the wrath of Brian's words and looks. He was afraid of him, and he slunk towards the door without another protest against the reception he had met with; he had shown his hand and been defeated; he had discovered an honest man, whose behaviour had perplexed him, and whose disregard of his own interests was past all comprehension. He had been led to expect so very different a man in Brian Halfday; he had found an enemy where he had believed a friend and confidant would rise up for a bribe. He could scarcely see his way to the end now—ruin and disgrace stared him in the face.

He went along the public rooms of the Museum preceded by its custodian; he crept like a shadow of evil down the broad oaken staircase into the hall; he sidled from the hall

into the street without another word to Brian, or even a furtive glance at him as he passed him on his way.

CHAPTER VII.

KNAVES IN COUNCIL.

WHEN he was fairly out of sight of his son, who remained at the open door of the Penton Museum as though the night air was grateful to him, Mr. William Halfday came to a full stop. The curves of the narrow, old-fashioned street had left him nothing save the top windows of the Museum to shake his clenched and trembling hands at, but this he did with energy, and with a considerable amount of violent and improper language.

He was still anathematizing his son with a vigour and eloquence that would have reflected credit on a better cause, when some one touched him suddenly and sharply on the shoulder with

a stick. Mr. Halfday was his natural self at once; he gave a cry of alarm, and fell against the wall for support in his new fright.

“Well—how did you get on with him?” croaked a rusty voice in his ears, and Mr. Halfday, coming back by spasms to more self-composure, recognized the form and features of old Peter Scone. He recollected also that this brother of the Noble Poor had spent the afternoon with him, and promised to wait for him near the gates of the Cathedral till the interview with Brian had taken place, and here was the man grinning like a death’s head and waiting for the news.

“How you have scared me, Scone!” he said.

“Did you take me for a policeman, Halfday?” asked the old man.

“I have nothing to fear from the police; but I hate to be taken off my guard,” he answered.

“Well, well, what does he say?” asked Peter, very eagerly; “you haven’t told me one scrap of the news for which I have been waiting and shivering here this hour.”

“Let us get into the Close, where we can talk safely,” said Mr. Halfday; “there may

be listeners at every corner of these cursed alleys."

"So there may," assented Scone, as he put his left arm through William Halfday's right, and toddled on by his side. "Am I leaning too heavily upon you?"

"Yes, you are," said Mr. Halfday, frankly.

"I can't help it. I'm a very old man, William, and require support. I have not your robust youth and strength."

"Don't talk like a fool," growled Halfday.

They passed through the open gates into the Close, and made for the broad road between the elms and the tall houses of the dean and chapter, where there were some yards of open ground on either side of them. An eaves-dropper under the giant trees, or lurking in the shadow of the opposite wall, could have learned nothing from their conversation, and might as profitably have been concealed in the cathedral towers which loomed before them in a starlit sky.

"Well, well—what does the curator say?" said Peter Scone again; "you put the question

delicately to him, and without wounding his feelings, to begin with?"

"You may guess what he said by the passion in which you found me, Peter," was his companion's reply.

"Ay, ay—you were saying awful words, but I fancied he had only driven too hard a bargain with you."

"He will have nothing to do with me," said Halfday. "He treats me like a dog."

"What did you offer him?" was Peter Scone's next inquiry.

"Halves of anything I got by the letters of administration."

"Did you—did you say anything about me?"

"Yes—I did."

"That was exceedingly imprudent—that was a breach of confidence between us, mind you," said Peter Scone; "you might have said a certain party had told you that he knew another certain party who thought it was possible to find a will of Adam Halfday's."

"I am too straightforward a man to go dodging about in that way," replied Halfday, scornfully.

“Oh, yes—certainly.”

“Besides, he would not have believed me, and I—I thought it was quite safe, he seemed to seize the bait so greedily. And it was play-acting—vile deception—by all that’s holy! And that man I am compelled by the law of the country to call my son!” he cried.

“It’s hard,” said Peter.

“I will never forgive him. Peter, old fellow, I have only you to trust in now. You will not desert me?”

“I am a poor man, and can’t do anything for you, William.”

“You can. And I can do a deal for you when I get rich, if you will only wait.”

“How do you mean?”

“I have explained it before, Peter; but you don’t, or you won’t understand,” said Mr. Halfday, in an injured tone of voice. “If you say nothing about the will——”

“I never said positively there was a will,” remarked Peter, cautiously. “I remember witnessing Adam’s signature to some document or other, and Adam’s saying he knew where to keep the paper in safety—and I think I might

be able, in a long search, to find it if it's still in existence. That is all I said."

"Except that you wanted five hundred pounds."

"I never said that, William. You remarked," and here the old man's bony fingers closed tightly on the arm of his companion, "that it would be worth five hundred pounds to anyone to find that will, and I agreed with you. This might be a long search—for Adam was an old magpie in storing things in holes and corners—and to find the will was wealth to the legatee at any rate."

"Look here, Peter," said Mr. Halfday, "you can keep the will till I am rich. That's fair. Let me get out the letters of administration and come into the property, and I will give you two thousand pounds down on the day you bring the document to me. You're safe—I am not."

"I could not trust you, William," Mr. Scone answered, shaking his head vigorously; "you would be off with all the money within an hour of laying your hands upon it. You have a most unpleasant way of slipping into ob-

scurity when it suits with your convenience.”

“I swear I will pay you every penny that I promise you. Bind me down in any way, Peter—and rely on my good faith.”

“I never relied upon anyone’s good faith in my life, and I am not going to begin now,” said Peter; “besides, life is short, and I’m eighty-six years of age. Hale and strong, but a very old man, William—awfully old.”

“Awfully obstinate and distrustful,” muttered William Halfday.

“And this may be robbing your own daughter, although I haven’t a doubt but that you would provide properly for her.”

“To be sure I would.”

“Although, if this will could be found—I say *if* it could be found—Dorcas would pay as handsomely as you to anyone lucky enough to discover it; or Dorcas’s mistress, the rich Miss Westbrook from the States, would give the man who found it money down. And William Halfday, it’s the money down—in these old hands—I want. Six months hence may be too late for me—six weeks hence—six days. Good God, man, don’t you understand? I’m eighty-six

years of age, and haven't time to enjoy life and money without I'm sharp about it. I must have money now—a heap of money!”

Peter Scone's avarice and eagerness were pitiable things to witness; but they were displayed before one whose feelings were not likely to be impressed or shocked. Halfday was fighting for money also, after his own bad fashion, but life was not at a critical point with him as with this aged man who clung to him, and raved of riches, and would not trust to time to bring them to him.

“I dare not ask my lawyer for more money. He told me flatly I must not expect any more,” said William Halfday; “and that I could afford to wait. To ask for a large sum would be to arouse his suspicions and set spies upon me. Peter, you must help me; you must not turn against me, and send me to beggary like this.”

“I don't send you to beggary.”

“You do. They will never help me. Brian hates me, and so will Dorcas; and I shall be cast down into the dirt of the streets. Had my father known I was coming back he would have left me a wealthy man.”

"I don't fancy he would have done anything of the kind," said Peter Scone; "but this is not time for fancy, is it?"

"Where are you going?"

"To Miss Westbrook—and your daughter."

"Do you know where to find them?"

"Yes. Miss Westbrook answered a letter of mine this afternoon."

"You will drive no bargain with them. You have lost your chance."

"Eh—how's that?" asked Peter Scone, alarmed at this declaration.

"Brian is not a man to stand still—he will have sought them out by this time. I saw it in his face."

"He will not discover them very easily, and he can do no good if he does. He has only your word for all this."

"He may go to the Hospital and search my father's rooms again, and yours, finding you are away from home."

Peter Scone broke into a childish little laugh, and patted William Halfday affectionately upon the arm.

"If I cannot put my hand upon that will,

no one else is likely to do so, William. If I were to die to-night, no one in all the world would ever find it, William," croaked old Peter Scone. "I am not afraid of what your son can do, clever as he thinks himself."

If he were to die to-night! It was a strange thought to put into the head of a man as desperate as William Halfday. "If he were to die to-night, no one would ever find the will," that was what the old man said, and meant; and dying suddenly as old men did die very often, he, William Halfday, would have leisure to grow rich!

What was this man's life worth, even to himself, that he should stand a barrier in the way of another's preferment? Why was a man's whole future, a man's last chance, to be sacrificed to this old wretch's rapacity and distrust?

"I hope you will not do anything in a hurry," said William Halfday. "I may see my way to money in the morning yet."

"I can't wait, and I shan't wait, William," replied Mr. Scone, decisively. "I have acted

fairly by you, and tried to help you; and if you have failed to help me in my turn, why, there's no blame to either of us. They may treat me badly though," said the old man; "Dorcas does not like me, and she will set the American girl against me, too, unless—— Ha! would you," he shrieked suddenly—"a poor old man like me, and eighty-six—help, help—here's murder doing!"

It was a stronger, sharper cry than the younger man had expected, and his brute-courage failed him. Life was not to be shaken so quickly from the body of Peter Scone, who had aroused the echoes of this ancient place with his wild cry for succour. The hands relaxed their grasp of the throat, and William Halfday's voice said, quickly and tremulously—

"A little joke of mine, Peter—that's all. Were you frightened? There, don't make a noise. Lean on me. My fun, nothing else, I assure you. Only my fun, to show you what might have happened from people more unprincipled than I am. Don't think anything of it—don't——"

But Peter had slid from his hold to the ground in his fright, and brought his poor old head against the iron railings of the cathedral garden. He was not dead, but he looked so like a dead man—he lay so still and quiet there—that William Halfday thought he was. The man was scared almost unto death himself at the sight of all that had happened in the last few minutes—at the consciousness of what might happen to him next if he were not prompt of action. He leaned over Peter Scone, and tried to feel for the beating of his heart, and failed, in the confusion of his own distracted mind, to discover any sign of life. He listened as if for the hurrying footsteps of people alarmed by the cry that had broken upon the stillness of the Close; but the leaves of the great elms were only rustling above him in the Summer air.

Under the hand that had sought for a heart-throb lay temptation again, in the shape of a pocket-book and key, which had been tied together by string, and deposited in the breast-pocket of Peter Scone before he had left the Hospital that afternoon. William Halfday for-

got part of his alarm at this discovery. Here might be the clue to the will of his father, and it was this, perhaps, which Peter had wished to sell him for five hundred pounds. He stood erect with the key and pocket-book in his hand. The owner was lying very quietly under the trees, and there was no one astir in Penton Close save he who had brought about the deed. Let him be gone before the world moved in this miserable matter, and wondered how Peter Scone had come to his death, and expressed its regret that there had been no one to look after a man bowed by age and infirmities, and liable to run down as suddenly as this at any moment.

He slunk away in the shadow of the wall, and reached the Close gates, and the archway in which they were set. There was a light in the lodge, and the porter was reading a newspaper by it, as he passed through unperceived. There was a clock over the mantelpiece of the room, William Halfday noticed, and it marked five minutes to the time of locking up for the night. By those minutes he had saved his

neck. Peter Scone would lie in the open air till morning now, and the noisy rooks would be the first to find him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANGELO'S WOOING.

IT was not a difficult task for Angelo Salmon to discover the new home of Miss Westbrook. There had been little disguise about it—only one faint effort to keep “herself to herself” for a day or two until she had had time to arrange her plans, and look more closely at the future. Mabel had no wish to hide forever from the friends who had gathered round in the days of her prosperity—even from the friends whom she had made in Penton; but as she told Dorcas very frankly, she did not desire to be “bothered” with them at present. They would respect her seclusion for a few days, she thought, not reckoning on the pertinacity of

Mr. Angelo Salmon, whose reverence for her did not extend to keeping in the background a minute longer than he could help. She had parted from him in a hasty fashion, and he was entitled to say "adieu"—if it were to be adieu—his own way, at all events. He had taken counsel of Brian Halfday, a sober and discreet man, before he had ventured to act upon the impulses of his own soft heart, and he would tell all this plainly to Miss Westbrook, quote his authority, and make his apologies, and she, he trusted, would forgive him. He was at the door of the house, wherein Miss Westbrook had sought shelter from society, at nine in the evening of the day she had been driven from St. Lazarus by the flyman whom Angelo had "interviewed," and given a sovereign for "information received."

Miss Westbrook and Dorcas were not at Penton, but residing in apartments in a rustic little villa between St. Lazarus and the city itself. A bill in the upstairs window, calling attention to furnished lodgings within, had arrested Mabel's notice on her journey from the Hospital, and she had called to the driver to stop, with

something more of her old impulse than she had lately exhibited.

"If we could rest there for a day or two, Dorcas," said Mabel, "I should be glad."

"But your rooms at the 'Mitre?'"

"Oh! I must give them up, and the maid who is waiting for me there—I haven't told you I am down in the world, Dorcas."

"Down in the world!" said Dorcas, opening her dark eyes to their full extent at the announcement, for she had heard not a word of the loss of fortune which had befallen her companion.

"Yes—I will tell you when we are settled."

And when they had settled in these quiet country quarters, and Dorcas had heard and been amazed by the news—and had only found time to express a little sympathy, and give way to several showers of tears, at which Mabel Westbrook laughed—it was formally announced by the landlady that Mr. Angelo Salmon was waiting below, and would be very glad to be honoured by an interview with Miss Westbrook.

The gentleman in attendance would have

been scarcely flattered had he heard the frank expression of Miss Westbrook's opinion upon his advent.

"How very tiresome!" she exclaimed, "then he has found us out already."

"He is always prying about," said Dorcas, in a more angry tone than her mistress, "he is——"

"Hush! child," said Mabel very quickly, "this is a dear friend of mine, of whom we cannot afford to think unkindly."

"A dear friend!" said Dorcas, with her eyes widening again, "you don't mean——"

"That he is any dearer than a friend. Oh no," she added, with another laugh.

"Ah!" said Dorcas, "he may be presently. There is no telling what may happen after the first start."

"That's philosophy, Dorcas," answered Mabel, "but we will leave the consideration of it for the present."

The subject was postponed, and Mr. Angelo Salmon sent for instead. He came in softly, as though a noise were likely to disturb the inmates of the room, and blushed and stam-

mered as he said "Good evening," and bowed low over the extended hand of Mabel Westbrook.

"You have soon found us," said Mabel.

"Yes, I have found you," he replied, "and I am very glad."

"How did you obtain the address?"

"I met the flyman—accidentally, just now in the High Street—and it struck me he would know," replied Angelo, blushing more vividly than ever.

"Yes,—but how did you know the flyman?"

"The flyman?—oh! the flyman, I think you said," was the confused reply, "well, Hodsman told me there was a piebald horse to the fly, and there are only three piebald horses in Penton, and I—but I am very glad to see you again, Miss Westbrook."

"I did not anticipate the honour would arrive so speedily. You might have given me more time to collect my thoughts," said Mabel.

"I was uneasy—I was anxious—I was really miserable, Miss Westbrook, to think you had left us," answered Angelo.

"Indeed."

“And I hope you are not angry with me for taking the first opportunity of coming to see you,” he said imploringly.

“No,” said Mabel thoughtfully, “I am not angry at a kind attention, or a generous impulse—no true woman should be.”

True woman! He remembered Brian Half-day’s words of consolation and encouragement at once: “A woman is only ungrateful to true affection when she is no true woman!” They gave him courage to speak out by degrees all that was in his heart, poor nervous being though he was, at his best. And Angelo Salmon was certainly at his best that night.

“I did not feel I could rest until I had discovered you,” he continued, “and I hope you are not in any way vexed because I have arrived so quickly after your departure from my father’s house. I have not acted hastily, or entirely on my own judgment in this matter.”

Mabel looked surprised.

“I do not understand you, Mr. Angelo,” she said.

“I will explain in one minute, Miss Westbrook,” he replied.

He took time to recover that amount of composure which he had lost, and whilst absorbed in the process, Dorcas stole from the room, like the considerate young woman that she was on that occasion. Angelo did not notice her departure; but Mabel let her go for purposes of her own. It might be as well that this folly of Angelo Salmon's should be ended at once and for ever—it would leave his path of life very clear ahead of him, and there would be no misunderstanding between them from that night: Let him confess all that was in his heart, and thus put an end to the delusion which he had fostered.

Angelo recovered himself somewhat, coughed faintly, and began again—

“I have not acted entirely on my own judgment, Miss Westbrook, I was saying,” he commenced; “or rather, I submitted my own impressions to one in whom you once desired me to place confidence.”

“Who is that?” said Mabel, quickly.

“Mr. Brian Halfday.”

“Yes—but——”

She did not complete her sentence, and

Angelo Salmon, after waiting a few moments, resumed the thread of his argument.

"You told me it was your conviction that I might rely upon Mr. Halfday as a friend; and I went to him when I discovered you had left the Hospital of St. Lazarus."

"I would have preferred your coming straight to me. It would have been more manly," said Mabel, thoughtfully.

Angelo looked disconsolate at this. He had followed her advice, and she did not compliment him on his blind obedience.

"I had quite made up my mind what to do, Miss Westbrook," he said, "before I saw Mr. Halfday, for that matter."

"What was the use of disturbing him, then?"

"I—I don't know. I thought I would hear what he had to say."

"And now I will hear what you have to say, Mr. Salmon," said Mabel, readily; "and we will set aside this Mr. Halfday from our discussion. Proceed."

She leaned back in her chair, and waited very patiently and coldly for his statement, whilst the red blood deepened more upon his forehead

and cherubic cheeks. But with all his confusion, his courage was not lacking to confess the truth. It was the courage of despair, too, he knew already; but he went on, speaking with less embarrassment as he proceeded:

"I am resuming a subject which I began this morning—which I would have finished 'then if you would have allowed me,'" he continued; "and which if I blunder through now I hope you will forgive. For I am clumsy of speech; I have not the happy knack of expressing by words exactly what I wish to say."

"I think you have."

"I thank you for the compliment, but I know I haven't," he replied. "I know very well I'm not a man up to the mark—that 'a rock or two more,' as the old women term it, would have completely settled me. But that is neither here nor there; I wish to say, to begin with, that I hope you will not consider me less your friend than formerly, and that in every way in which I can be of service, I hope you will command me."

"I do not see that in any way I can call upon you for assistance," was Mabel's answer.

"You cannot tell. The loss of a large fortune may entail upon you, for a short while, at least, pecuniary embarrassments for which you are not prepared at present, and I—I may—I beg your pardon," he added, as Mabel held up her small white hand.

"Do not talk to me of money," she said; "you are very good, and I appreciate your goodness, but please do not talk to me of money. I have a balance still at Penton Bank."

Angelo remembered Brian Halfday's warning.

"I beg pardon," he said again. "I will not mention another word concerning it, only I did not know how you might be situated after the collapse of the bank in the States, and—and it suggested itself to me——"

"You will spare me, I know," said Mabel, once more interrupting him; "you will understand I am a proud and independent little woman at present. Mr. Halfday surely did not advise you to talk of money to me?"

"Oh! no."

"I am glad of that," said Mabel.

"It is only fair to Mr. Halfday to remark

that he strongly advised me not to mention money to you."

"He and I have quarrelled about money matters before this," said Mabel, thoughtfully, "and he knows the danger of the topic. But," she added, with her white forehead knit a little with the "second thoughts" behind it, "why did he ask you to be careful in this case with me?"

"One moment, if you will allow me, and I will explain," he entreated.

"I am in no hurry."

Angelo Salmon took a long breath, and then dived into the one great subject of his life, and got over it for good.

"Miss Westbrook—Miss Mabel," he began, "it is useless to dispute the fact that—that I have been a different being since I first had the pleasure of your acquaintance. I—I have felt a wiser and better man, if you will not think me conceited in saying so. I have seen before me something to live for—and strive for—and pray for—and that is your affection. Miss Westbrook, upon my word and honour, I love you very much indeed."

It was a simple confession, and soon related. There was no eloquence about it, and a great deal of embarrassment; but it was a genuine utterance, which affected the listener more than a page and a half of the best blank verse would have done under similar circumstances.

Mabel looked down, and changed colour at the young man's earnestness, and the tears for a while swam in her great grey eyes.

Angelo awaited her reply, and presently it came :—

“ My poor Angelo,” she said, in a strange, sad tone which he knew at once presaged his death-warrant, “ I am very sorry you should have thought of me. I am not unmindful of the value of the compliment you pay me, or why at such a time you speak out all that is in your heart; but I wish you had not said a word.”

“ Why?”

“ Because you might have seen the truth for yourself, and spared both of us,” she replied; “ because your proposal suggests I have given you encouragement.”

“ Now pray don't think that for a moment,”

Angelo hastened to add. "I am presumptuous, I know—I should have waited a longer period—addressed you in a different manner—said and done a hundred different things in a hundred different ways—but I could only realize the facts that you had met misfortune, were going from Penton, and in a single moment I might lose you. I was miserable—and I came to you."

"In declining this offer, Angelo," she said, "do I render you less miserable?"

"I—I don't know," was his reply.

"And I must decline it—thankfully, but very firmly—and trusting such a question as this may never rise between us again."

"Very well—certainly—of course it shall not," said Angelo, with a great gulp down of something in his throat, "I am the last man to harass and distress you by my pertinacity."

"I believe that."

"Although I did not expect you would say 'yes' to my proposal," he continued, "or was vain enough to believe I had made any impression upon you. Quite the contrary."

"Why then——"

“But as I told Mr. Halfday a short while ago, I only wanted a faint hope to build upon, a hope that in good time—a long day hence—I don’t care how long—I mean I do care about that a little—” he said, correcting himself, and blushing more vividly at his blunder, “that you would learn to regard me with less—less—dislike.”

“I do not dislike you, Mr. Salmon,” Mabel replied, “I know you are an honest and true friend. Keep so—I am short of friends just now—but never let me think again you are dreaming of me as your future wife. I am totally unfit for you.”

“Yes,” said Angelo, with a heavy sigh, “he said so.”

“Who said so?”

“Brian Halfday.”

“This evening?”

“Yes.”

“You two appear to have been discussing all my merits and demerits,” Mabel remarked.

“You said he was a man to place confidence in.”

“Yes. But one man does not go to another

to trouble him with such love nonsense as this."

"No—no," cried Angelo, "not nonsense—to love you!"

Mabel coloured again.

"A man like Brian Halfday would consider your confession nonsensical and trivial," said Mabel.

"Oh no," answered Angelo, "he saw I was in earnest."

"And needed his advice?"

"Well—yes."

"And he gave you a sufficient amount of it to bring you here?"

"Yes," Angelo said again, and this time very mournfully.

"A sufficient amount of encouragement, I mean?"

"Yes," said Angelo for the third time.

Mabel clasped her hands together, and leaned forwards, full of interest in the subject.

"Tell me what he said," asked Mabel Westbrook, almost sharply.

CHAPTER IX.

“PUMPING.”

ANGELO SALMON was not a quick-witted man, but he looked up as Mabel's voice changed. There was something in the tones, and in her manner, that struck him as peculiar, and Mabel saw he perceived it.

“I am only curious to learn how so hard and strange a man as Brian Halfday would consider a matter of this kind, and in a light encouraging to you,” said Mabel, as if in explanation.

“Yes—exactly.”

“It is no secret, I suppose?”

“No—but why should I embarrass you further by all this?” he replied.

“Don't mind me, Angelo,” she said. “Mr. Halfday, I should have imagined, would have

been angry at your intruding on his studies—would have laughed at your romance, even if he had finally warned you of the folly of fostering it.”

“I have said, Miss Westbrook, he did nothing of the kind,” replied Angelo; “he received me favourably, and listened patiently, after a time.”

“And what did he advise you to do—and say? This man,” she added angrily, “who had no right to advise you concerning myself, who knows less of me than you do, and cares a great deal less too. Why will you not tell me what he said?”

“It is no use,” said Angelo, shaking his head—“it is only prolonging my pain.”

“Prolonging your fiddlestick!” cried Mabel, with more energy and less sentiment. “I suppose you did not follow his advice, and don’t like to confess as much to me. He told you to keep away—you know he did!”

“Upon my honour he did not,” said Angelo, lured into the relation of the facts at last; “he told me to persevere—to tell the truth of my love, and win you.”

"And win me!" said Mabel, her voice sinking very low now—"as if it were an easy task for you!"

"No—he did not imply that."

"As if I were an easy conquest to any man with money enough to keep me!"

"I have already told you, Miss Westbrook, that he cautioned me against mentioning money in your presence," Angelo answered.

"Ah! so you have," was the reply. "He sketched out quite a plan of the campaign for you. I hope you have followed his instructions."

"You are vexed with me for going to him," said Angelo.

"It does not matter in the least," replied Mabel—"no, I am not vexed; but you acted foolishly in going, that is all. Shall you return and tell him that his advice has been vanity and vexation, and you have failed to secure me?"

"I don't know what I shall do," responded Angelo helplessly.

"He will be surprised at the result of your mission," said Mabel.

"He may be. I can't tell."

"Women, in his estimation, are easily captured, it is evident," she continued, thoughtfully; "although wise men make mistakes at times, when women are in question."

"You are offended with me for not acting on my own judgment," cried Angelo, "and yet I should have come here with the same words on my lips—the same feelings in my breast."

"I am not offended with you," she replied.

"With him, then?" he said, shrewdly.

"No, certainly not."

"Not for encouraging me—and wishing me God speed?"

"In wishing you God speed," she repeated, "he must have been deeply interested in this case, and I am very much surprised."

"He would be naturally interested," said Angelo.

"Why?"

"He is interested in you."

"Yes—so it seems!"

"You did not doubt that?"

"I did not think much about it," replied Mabel carelessly; "I came to England in search

of his grandfather—of himself and sister—of any one of his kin, and that probably aroused a certain amount of interest in me in return—such interest as it was. But there, there, do not let us talk about it any more! It is not worth the waste of words we have given to it, Angelo.”

“If you remember, it is not my fault that we have dwelt upon it so long,” said Angelo.

“Is it not?” she answered absently. “Ah! well—perhaps I was curious a little. And now, you will promise me never to speak of this again—to take my answer as final—to accept my thanks once more for the honour you have done me—and to keep my friend for the little while longer I remain in England.”

“Are you thinking of leaving England, then?” he faltered forth.

“Yes, I shall go back to America very soon.”

“You have not said anything of this before,” he said, half reproachfully.

“I have not had much time,” answered Mabel, with a smile; “but there are many

friends over there who can help me—and will help me.”

“I fancied you had no very intimate friends there—I—I thought you said it was your grandfather’s wish you should live in England,” remarked Angelo.

“He thought I should be a rich woman. In England there is not much sympathy for a poor one.”

“Oh! Miss Westbrook!”

“What is the matter?”

“I did not think you could speak so bitterly as that.”

Mabel laughed.

“You see I am not perfection,” she said, “but a cross-grained female, whom a little puts out. You will find me my old self to-morrow, if you care to call.”

“If I care!” exclaimed Angelo, “of course I care—although I am awfully distracted in mind, and dare hardly see you yet.”

His voice shook a little with its old feebleness, and Mabel looked critically at him.

“No, upon second thoughts, don’t come, Angelo, to-morrow.”

"Very well—if you wish me not."

"Take a holiday. Go to your chambers in London—or to the seaside, where a change will do you good. I am sure of it," added Mabel.

"I am not."

"You have taken Mr. Halfday's advice—now, do me a favour, and try mine."

"And go away from you?"

"Yes—for awhile."

"It will be for ever. You will disappear, and never tell me where you are again."

"No, I will not. Although it would be as well, perhaps," she answered.

"I will go," he said, rising; "I am sorry I have troubled you so much this evening, but I felt I should like to explain the true state of my feelings, and I have done so—with a vengeance," he added, in so dismal a tone, and with so odd a look, that Mabel Westbrook might have laughed under different circumstances.

She was in no laughing mood that evening, however; Angelo had said much to disturb her, and there remained food for thought in his confession. She was sorry now that he had come wooing to her. Only a little while ago it

had seemed better for him and her that they should clearly understand each other, but she was scarcely certain now of the wisdom of the step he had undertaken. It had been done in a hurry, and there was confusion in consequence. She was glad when he had shaken hands with her and quitted the house; there was a sense of relief in his absence—in the loneliness that seemed to come to her by way of comfort after he had gone.

She did not move from the seat where he had left her, but drifted at once into thoughts born of the interview and of her stay in England, and both strangely intermixed. Life had been a whirl of events with her since she had acted for herself in it, and there had ensued much responsibility, some mystery, and more mistakes. All her girlish thoughts—her girlish happiness even—seemed to have vanished in these latter days, and to have left her a cold, hard, matter-of-fact woman. She had looked for peace and rest in England, but they had not come to her; she had dreamed of friends here, and she was only surrounded by people whom it was impossible to comprehend.

The world had been full of sudden changes, and it was natural that she should change with it; but she was not growing more content.

A soft pressure of two folded hands upon her shoulder aroused her from thought at last, and to the consciousness of the night's being an hour older since her guest had withdrawn.

"You are very sad, my mistress," said the low voice of Dorcas in her ears, "and it is unlike you."

"I am only thoughtful."

"There are tears upon your cheeks."

"I did not know that," said Mabel, hastily brushing them away.

"Is it because of the money you have lost, after all?"

"No—no, Dorcas."

"I am glad," said Dorcas. "I have heard so much of money all my life, there have been such struggles for it in my family, I see the value and the power of it myself so clearly, that it was natural to think you should be fretting for its loss."

Mabel shook her head and smiled faintly.

"When it loses me my friends it will be time to grieve," said Mabel.

"I am to be one of your friends—do you think you will lose me?" inquired Dorcas.

"I hope not; and yet you may not like to go to America," said Mabel.

"To America! You have not spoken of that journey before."

"No; I have just made up my mind."

"To America!" repeated Dorcas. "That is a long way, and—and Brian may not like me to go."

"We will not discuss the question to-night," said Mabel, wearily; "I am tired of discussion."

"I thought you had come to England to live," continued Dorcas, despite this protest—"I thought you had told me so, or Brian had said so; but, oh! don't go yet awhile, please, Miss Mabel!—don't leave me yet!—don't take away the better thoughts which have come to me since I have known how good you are!"

Mabel was astonished at this outburst, and replied—

“Why, Dorcas, you are as upset to-night as I am, and both without much reason for it.”

“But when shall you go to America?” said Dorcas.

“I am in no hurry,” was the reply; “I have learned my lesson in life—never to act in too great haste again.”

“Will that man go with you?”

“What man?”

“That Mr. Salmon—as your husband?”

“Why, Dorcas!—is it likely?”

“He is a man very fond of you, and he is rich—independent of his hateful father,—and you don’t care for anybody else.”

“No!”

“And he spoke outright all that was in his heart, as a man should who cares for a woman; and——”

“Dorcas, you have been listening!”

“I—I——” began Dorcas.

“I did not think you could have acted so meanly as that,” said Mabel, with a severity of tone that surprised and depressed her companion.

"I was afraid he was going to separate us—that you were going to accept him—and, and I did not listen long," said Dorcas, by way of extenuation; "I——"

Dorcas paused, for there was a sudden crash of glass in the window of the room, and both women were taken off their guard, and not too heroic to scream. A window had been broken from without, and before Dorcas and Mabel had crossed the room, and torn aside the curtains to look into the front garden and the high road, a second window followed the first to destruction.

"What is it?—who is it?" exclaimed the inmates.

"Let me in," said a feeble voice from without; "I am ill—I have news for you—and there's no time to lose."

Mabel opened the window and looked down from it to the grass-lawn, whereon was a human figure that had been endeavouring to attract attention by demolishing the window-glass with the handle of a heavy walking-stick.

“Who are you?” inquired Mabel.

“Peter Scone of St. Lazarus,” was the reply.

CHAPTER X.

PETER CONFESSES.

TEN minutes after the question and answer with which our last chapter closed, Peter Scone was seated in an arm-chair, with Mabel and Dorcas bending over him. They had brought him into the house with difficulty. When he had first arrived he had been too weak to reach the front steps and had plunged madly at the windows with his stick to attract attention, which, having secured, he had dropped on the lawn like a stone.

In Mabel's room he had come back slowly to himself, and was now sipping some brandy-and-water, and glaring over the glass at the fair Samaritans who had befriended him. His natural

colour had not returned to his face, which was of a greenish-grey now, instead of yellow parchment—otherwise, at first sight, there was not any marked difference in his personal appearance.

“Now will you tell us, Mr. Scone, what has happened to bring you here in so much haste?” asked Mabel.

“You wanted me to call to-night.”

“I answered your letter, which was full of mystery,” was the reply. “I expected you earlier in the evening, but I was certainly unprepared for the way in which you announced your presence. You have given me and Dorcas a great fright.”

“If you had had such a fright as I have, I doubt if you would have survived it,” said Peter; “just feel the left side of my head, ma’am.”

Mabel did so, and found a lump as large as a walnut very speedily.

“You have had a fall.”

“I have had a blow. I believe it has been done by a small crowbar, but it will not be easy to prove that.”

“Who has done it?”

“That girl’s father—William Halfday.”

“William Halfday!”

“But I’ll have the law of him—I’ll have my revenge of him—I’ll let him know what it is to attack an honest man, whose age should have brought him reverence, not violence. If I had my way,” he hissed between his closed gums, “I’d hang that devil! He deserves it—he meant to kill me—he meant to leave me in the Close for dead—he tried to kill me—he did, he did,—I’ll swear it!”

Peter’s excitement was great now; he hammered his stick upon the floor, he stamped his feet, his eyes blazed in their sockets, and his whole face was convulsed with rage.

“To think I should be served like this at my time of life!” he cried, when he had recovered a sufficient amount of breath to speak again; “to think I might have been murdered and nobody the wiser! The man who picked me up in the Close would not believe me, and told me I was drunk. Drunk—I, Peter Scone!—think of that, now!”

“What can we do?” asked Mabel, “you do

not explain to us—you do not give us any news. What of this William Halfday?"

"He must be followed—and found at once. It's for your sake, Dorcas, for you are a rich lady."

"A rich lady!"

"I make no terms with you—but you won't forget me," he entreated, "I always liked you very much, Dorcas—I persuaded your grandfather to do this for you—but all I want is to foil that wretch, and see him, before I die, begging for bread in Penton streets."

"He is raving mad," said Dorcas, "or, yes—he *is* drunk!"

"I'm as sane and sober as you are, you young cat—you unkind child, I mean!" cried Peter Scone, "but you will not listen to me. There's a will, I tell you there's a will—drawn up by your grandfather, and leaving all his money to you—and that means the twenty thousand pounds which this lady paid away."

"Where is the will?" asked Mabel.

"Go on, Peter, go on. Oh! great Heaven, if this man should die before he tells us where

it is!" exclaimed Dorcas, as excited as the old man now.

"Ah! I thought I should interest you presently," said Peter Scone.

"Go on," cried Dorcas, "you don't know—you can't imagine—what all this means to me. Go on, Peter—I will make you rich too, if you will tell me where to find the will!"

"Patience, Dorcas, patience!" said Mabel.

"Madam, I have no patience," answered Dorcas peevishly.

"Your father wanted to bribe me, but I wouldn't have it," said the mendacious Peter; "I was for justice to the orphan. When he found I was not to be talked over he offered me two thousand pounds, as true as I'm sitting here—and he knocked me down with an iron crowbar when I wouldn't take it."

"Had you the will with you?"

"No; but in my pocket-book, which he stole along with my key—I'll get him two years for that too!—there is a memorandum where the will is," said Peter; "I don't know for an absolute certainty, of course, but I fancy its

all right. He was fond of hiding things away from Dorcas."

"Ha!—perhaps in the old church?—behind the panel and under the oaken seat where he used to sit," cried Dorcas, "I know—I know, I could find it in the dark."

"Yes; that's the place—and William Half-day is hunting for it now, or, I'm no judge of what a blackguard he is."

"He cannot tell where my grandfather used to sit at church."

"It is all explained in the pocket-book," said Peter; "I thought if I died suddenly, it ought to be found—and——"

"Tell her the rest," interrupted Dorcas, "think what is best to be done till I come back—don't follow me, for I am safe enough. I cannot stop another moment."

"Where are you going?"

"To St. Lazarus—by the cross cut over the meads," she cried. "Don't stop me—don't ask me any questions—my whole life's happiness is at stake!"

Dorcas dashed out of the room, and the instant afterwards the front door was heard to

slam noisily behind her. Mabel ran to the window and called to her to stop, to wait for her, but Dorcas only looked back and shook her head and hands, and went on bareheaded like a wild thing.

The night was warm, but dark, and the stars had disappeared as she turned in the direction of St. Lazarus, and ran, with extraordinary swiftness for a woman, along the dusty high-road.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ESCORT ON THE ROAD.

LEFT alone with the senior member of the Brotherhood of the Noble Poor, Mabel Westbrook remained for a while uncertain how to act. She was not disposed to wait patiently for the return of Dorcas, as that excitable young woman had enjoined her to do ; the mission was too full of mystery and danger.

Mr. Scone watched Mabel with his blinking eyes, as if doubtful of her purpose, and when she suddenly started to her feet, he said—

“What’s the matter ? What are you going to do ?”

“I must follow Dorcas to St. Lazarus.”

"You had better not," warned Peter; "you can't get into the place now—she has the start of you."

"I can wake Hodsman the porter."

"That's no use. Dorcas will have failed or succeeded long before you are at the Cardinal's Tower, young lady."

"But that dreadful man, her father?"

"A dreadful rascal—don't call him a man," said Peter, with supreme disgust.

"They will meet perhaps in the church," said Mabel; "he may have found the document already, and what will follow then? I cannot wait till she returns."

"There's no use in going, I keep telling you, but you're very obstinate," he muttered.

"I can't rest here," said Mabel.

"What is to become of me?" he asked. "Is anybody going to take care of me, or am I to be sent away now there's nothing more to be got out of me, and with this lump on my head, too? By gosh," he added, as he passed his hand carefully over it, "it's growing like a wurzel!"

"Would you like to see a doctor?"

"No, I should not," he replied. "I have done all my life without one, and I'm not going to begin now."

"I will ask the landlady to prepare a bed for you."

"I shall sit up till Dorcas comes back from St. Lazarus."

"You are tired—you have gone through much excitement to-day," said Mabel.

"I would have gone through fire and water to do Dorcas Halfday a service."

"You are very kind," said Mabel.

"She is a girl I always liked——"

"You have said so before."

"Though we have had our little quarrels at the Hospital, for a more aggravating girl I don't know. Where are you going now?"

"To find my hat and cloak. I must follow her."

Mabel hastened from the room, and the old man crossed his hands upon his stick, and thought of all his wrongs, and all his chances of reward for this last noble action of his life. He was dozing before Mabel Westbrook returned, but his small eyes glittered from be-

neath his shaggy brows again as she came into the room.

"You are wasting your time—you don't know where to find her—you will put William Half-day on his guard, if he is prowling about the church," said Peter Scone.

"I shall die of suspense if I stay here."

"It's a pity women can't take things quietly," he said, "but must always rattle on in a flare-away fashion. Dorcas is quite safe—she is used to this kind of game, but you are not."

"Used to this!"

"Many and many a row about meeting her lover in the fields beyond the cottages has she had with old Adam——"

"Her lover," repeated Mabel—"she has a lover, then?"

"To be sure ; she was as agile as a cat after him too ; she would cross the river with one spring ; there was no keeping that madcap on the premises when she wanted to get off them. She——"

"Tell me all this another time," said Mabel, restlessly ; "I must go to St. Lazarus to-night."

"You will never find her," said Peter; "she will return as she came by the field-path, which you do not know."

"So that she has met with no harm, I shall not care for that," replied Mabel; "I shall not be long away—anything that you require ring that bell for."

"I shall want some supper, and some beer," mumbled the old man; "and there's an awful draught somewhere, which will give me my death of cold, if it's not stopped."

"The air comes through the windows which you broke."

"Oh, I forgot the windows. They can be stuffed up with something, I suppose?"

"Yes—yes, tell the landlady. I am going now."

"It's very foolish of you, I must say again," said Peter; but Mabel took no heed of his renewed protest against her wilfulness, but went at once from the house. She paused at the gate before commencing her journey—some one was rapidly approaching along the high-road, and the sharp, quick steps seemed not wholly unfamiliar to her. The traveller was

advancing from the sleeping city towards the country suburbs, and instinctively she waited for him, standing back in the shadow of the trees which grew within the garden. It was as well that travellers on the road should pass her, if untrustworthy and bound in her direction.

The footsteps came nearer; from her point of observation Mabel could perceive now the figure of a man walking in the middle of the road, and at a fair swinging pace. As it approached and passed her, she called out,

“Mr. Halfday.”

Brian, for it was he, stopped at once, and Mabel came from her hiding-place to meet him.

“Miss Westbrook!” he exclaimed, “something *has* happened then!”

“Yes, something has happened.”

“What can you be doing here—where are you going?” he asked, almost sharply.

“I will tell you as we proceed; and if you will accompany me to St. Lazarus——”

“I am going to St. Lazarus—but you?”

“Your sister is there,” explained Mabel, “she has heard news from Peter Scone——”

"Of a will—yes," he said, interrupting her with his customary quickness.

"How did you know?" asked Mabel.

"I will tell you presently. Have you seen this Scone?"

"He is in my house," said Mabel, pointing to the cottage she had recently quitted.

"You are lodging there?"

"Yes."

"I will see that old scamp before we proceed any further," said Brian, stepping towards the house, when Mabel put her hands upon his arm.

"We are losing time," she said, "Dorcas may be in danger—your father may be already at St. Lazarus."

"You are right, Miss Westbrook," he said, "I can learn all the news from you."

He turned, and together they proceeded along the country road.

"I am selfish in allowing you to accompany me," he said, stopping again; "I can act in this matter so much better without you. You must go back."

"I could not do it. Please let me come with

you," she entreated; "I am unhappy in that house already."

He wavered and relented, but not too graciously.

"I hate to keep changing my mind like a girl," he said; "but—but you wish it," he added, suddenly.

He offered her his arm, and she placed her hand confidingly upon it.

"I am glad I have met you," Mabel said, frankly; "I feel safe with you."

"It is something to have gained your confidence," Brian replied; "and yet I hardly know now why distrust has changed to faith. I don't deserve it."

"I hope you do," was her reply.

"I am only trying to deserve it."

They walked on in silence after this, Brian increasing his pace unconsciously, until Mabel found herself trotting and panting to keep up with him.

"I am walking too fast for you," he said suddenly.

"Oh! no, not at all," replied Mabel, in little spasms of apology, "I—I always walk—fast."

“There is no hurry—and there is no danger,” Brian said, relaxing his speed; “anyone would think we were hastening to stop a murder, or catch a murderer. Dorcas is on her own ground at the Hospital, and could defeat half a dozen such miserable tricksters as my father is. Tell me now all that has happened, please?”

Mabel related the particulars of Peter Scone’s arrival at her house, and the news which he had brought. She spoke of Dorcas’s excitement and departure, and he listened with great interest, and refrained from interrupting her.

“She must have the start of William Half-day,” he said, “and she knows where the key of the church is to be found. I did not think of the church—I was going to search in the cottage, where you told me once I was cruel and a coward.”

Mabel started.

“What a memory you have!” she said.

“I am sure to remember the hard words that are hurled at me—and you were particularly hard upon me that night. Have *you* forgotten?”

“Oh! no, but it has all been explained. Why do you think of it again?”

"I like to think of it," he said.

"That is hardly an answer."

"It is satisfactory to have lived down your bad opinion of me—to find myself acting as escort to the lady who abused me so soundly. It is pleasant to think——"

He stopped suddenly, and there was a change in his voice, which deepened and vibrated more.

"But I will not think about that."

"You are mysterious, Mr. Halfday," said Mabel.

"I am idiotic—that's all," was his prompt reply ; "and I am neglecting business, and forgetting the mission we have in hand. What is our course of action?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose not," was his dry reply ; "we must make for the church—where the will is hidden."

"If Dorcas is only safe, and has found it, I shall be very glad," said Mabel.

"Fresh complications will arise with this fresh disposal of the money," said Brian ; "are you prepared for them?"

"I haven't thought about them."

"Disappointments may ensue—will ensue."

"In what way?"

"You will be disappointed in Dorcas, to begin with," Brian replied; "she will change with her good fortune, or I have misunderstood her all my life."

"Sometimes I fancy that that is possible," said Mabel, thoughtfully.

"That she will change?"

"No—that you have misunderstood her."

"She is incomprehensible in many respects, I confess," Brian said, "and that there is some good in her, I have never denied, or she should not have taken her place in your home to distress you at a time of trial."

"The trial of the money—do you mean?"

"Yes."

"My losses do not affect me," replied Mabel; "it is very wrong, I know, but I do not care about them."

"You have fallen from riches to comparative poverty—and that is a heavy fall."

"For a man," added Mabel, caustically.

"For a young, earnest woman, without knowledge of the world, or what respectable

indigence is like, the fall is great," he said.

"I shall recover from it," answered Mabel.

"As for this money which you put in Penton Bank, you are not a hair's-breadth closer to it, even if all that Peter Scone has said is true," said Brian.

"I am not thinking of it—why do you always talk to me of money?" she asked irritably.

"It was a money question which made us first acquainted," said Brian; "perhaps that is the reason."

"No—it is not."

"Or you have not a proper respect for money," he continued; "and I am educating your mind by degrees to regard it with reverence."

"Will that take much time?"

"Probably. But we are both young and have time before us."

"You will have to follow me to America, then, to teach me your theories."

"What is that?" he said sharply, and in a different tone.

"I am going back to the States—that is all."

"You have not said anything of this before,"

he said reprovingly; "how long has this idea of your return to America been under consideration?"

"I don't know—I can't say."

"How long——"

"We are forgetting Dorcas."

"She is quite safe. I am not alarmed for her safety in the least. How long have you given up your promise to——"

"Who is this coming across the fields to the left? There is something moving in the dark! Mabel exclaimed suddenly; "is it Dorcas?"

"Yes—it is," said Dorcas, leaping lightly over the stile into the high road.

"Have you the will?" asked Brian.

"Yes!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE WALK BACK.

BRIAN asked a few hurried questions of his sister as the three stood together in the high road, and Dorcas answered them in as hasty a fashion as they were put to her. She had run all the way to St. Lazarus; she had encountered no one in her progress; she had entered the church and found her way in the dark, like a cat, to the old pew where Adam Halfday had sat for many years, and dozed and dreamed and schemed, and tried to pray, and she had found the will secreted in the place to which Peter Scone had given her the clue.

Mabel Westbrook and Brian were each struck

by Dorcas's manner, which was new and peculiar. The excitement of the adventure and the triumph at the result had not raised her spirits or rendered her communicative, and the agitation which had preceded her departure had completely vanished. She was calm and grave and sullen—it was the Dorcas whom Mabel had first seen in the quadrangle of St. Lazarus, one evening late in May, with the fire and impulse of her nature pressed down in her heart.

“How is it he is with you?” Dorcas asked in her turn, of Mabel Westbrook.

“Your father had disclosed the secret of the will to him—and your brother was coming on to the Hospital.”

“It is lucky I was there before you, Brian,” she said, steadily regarding him.

“Why lucky?” he inquired.

“You would have taken sides against me,” she said; “you would not have treated me fairly in this matter.”

Brian shrugged his shoulders, but did not reply.

“You would have seen so much in the will—

and planned for me so much, I am sure," she added.

"Have you read its contents?" asked Brian.

"I have seen enough to know I am mistress of the money," said Dorcas.

"The lawful owner of the money is here, Dorcas—and you know that as well as I do," said Brian, sternly.

She glanced at him, and said moodily—

"I know what is right, and what is just to her, and I will have no prompting from you."

"Has anything new happened since you left home?" asked Mabel.

"No," answered Dorcas; "but you see how he meets me with suspicion, as if I were planning against you. As if I am ever likely to forget the first woman who held her hand out to me and called me friend."

"We need not talk of this now," said Mabel.

"No—no. Please let me be awhile—I have much upon my mind—I have more to think about than anyone dreams—I am going mad with thought," Dorcas said, with a flash of her old impetuous manner as she stamped her foot upon the ground.

"May I see this will?" asked her brother.

"It is too dark here," said Dorcas.

"I have the short-sighted gift of reading in the dark," said Brian.

"You can see it, if you like," said Dorcas sullenly again.

"I do like—very much," was her brother's emphatic reply.

Dorcas took the will from the bosom of her dress, and said to Mabel,

"See, I trust him more than he trusts me—and yet you cannot imagine how he has taken part against me."

"We will tell Miss Westbrook the whole story presently," said Brian, "and she shall judge between us."

He took the will from his sister's hands, and opened it where they were standing, holding it close to his eyes, after looking upwards once as if doubtful of the quality of the light to be obtained from the stars, a few of which had stolen forth again from the cloudy sky. His was a strong sight and did not betray him in this instance—and his grandfather's handwriting was familiar to him. He read the document

through quickly—it was not a long one—folded it, and returned it to his sister.

“Yes,—you are quite right, Dorcas,” he said in a deep voice, “you have more to consider than people fancy,—and the end of this is far from clear.”

“I know it,” answered Dorcas.

The three went on together a few more yards, and then Dorcas stopped again.

“I wish you two would proceed by yourselves. I don’t like this watching of me,” she said sullenly again.

“We are not watching you, Dorcas,” said Mabel.

“I did not expect you to follow me like this.”

“We thought there might be danger.”

“I am used to danger,” said Dorcas ; “go on, please—I will keep you in sight. I can only bear my own company to-night.”

“Come, Miss Westbrook,” said Brian, offering his arm again, which Mabel did not take this time, but walked on by his side, at a pace less rapid than they had set forth upon their journey.

"What makes her so strange?" asked Mabel of her companion.

"On the brink of her good fortune, she turns giddy that is all," was the reply; "weak-minded folk invariably do."

"It is a poor explanation," said Mabel; "but I do not wish to force myself upon your confidence."

"Meaning that there is no confidence between us?" he rejoined.

"Not much," answered Mabel.

"After paying twenty thousand pounds for it too—that is hard."

"Are you in one of your aggravating moods to-night?" she asked.

"Very likely," he confessed; "I have been perplexed, harassed, tortured within the last few hours; if I have said anything harsh to you, forgive me."

"You are strange, that is all," said Mabel, softened by his apology.

"I come of a strange family. You will find that young woman in the background a trifle eccentric also on a closer acquaintance," he remarked.

"Yes. But I have seemed to look to you for help, in some incomprehensible way," said Mabel; "I feel to be waiting, as it were, for your courage to support me when my troubles come. But that is an odd feeling which will soon die out."

"Let it last, Miss Westbrook, if you can," he added earnestly.

"As long as I live?" she rejoined archly.

"That may be too rash a promise, like the other."

They went on in silence for awhile, with Dorcas Halfday some thirty yards in the background. Dorcas had no interest in them at that time; beyond the present hour, and present life, she was trying vainly to guess of all that might be waiting to change her, tempt her, set her apart from the man and woman going on away from her—just as they would do presently for the remainder of their lives, and she not much to blame for it.

They were talking of her again, but she did not hear them.

"You do not ask me the tenor of the will which Dorcas has discovered," was Brian's next remark to Mabel.

"I am not curious."

"And you will not despair if the money never comes back to your hands?"

"No."

"It lies further away now, it is wholly beyond your power to recover it, and you do not feel as if you had fallen into the hands of robbers?" he said.

"No—but I thought we were not to speak of this money again," said Mabel. "What an inexhaustible subject it is to you! How you change and twist it into different shapes to lead me into an argument concerning it! Why is this?"

"It is on my mind, and you have been treated badly," he replied; "I have tried hard to restore you to your rights, and failed so miserably,—my family is a curse to yours,—and two generations only perpetuate the wrong."

"You regard this morbidly, indeed."

"And you too lightly," he replied; "if you would only fret about it, or revile me, you would be acting more naturally, and—more like a woman."

"Thank you for the compliment?"

"I said a little while ago that I was glad Dorcas had balked my father in his greed—but I am not now."

"Indeed! Why?"

"William Halfday is a weak, vacillating man over whom I might in time, and with study, have exercised some power for good; but with Dorcas, I am doomed to fail."

"Your failure will not distress me," said Mabel; "why should it affect you?"

"Because—but there, there, I have said all this before, and you will not listen patiently. Until I knew you I was a vain prig, and thought myself a student of human nature, whom no man or woman could deceive. But you are as great a riddle to me as when you came to Penton Museum one evening in May."

Mabel laughed pleasantly. The shadows of the night had vanished; the dangers of it had crept back into the darkness, and she could look at life brightly again. The serious mood of Brian Halfday was worth a smile or two, she thought.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he muttered, in half reproof.

"I am not unhappy," she said; "why may I not laugh?"

"At me?" he rejoined.

"At your dulness, which cannot read a woman who has not attempted much disguise," she answered.

"And yet I understand you partly," he murmured, "and value your friendship and esteem before any one's in the whole dark world before me."

"Why dark world?" she asked.

He did not explain. He confronted her with another question that brought them to debatable ground again. These two could not agree upon any question on earth, each was fully convinced a few minutes afterwards. Quarrel they must, by the law governing the lives of cat and dog.

"Have you seen Angelo Salmon this evening?" he inquired.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW WORDS.

MABEL WESTBROOK had forgotten Angelo Salmon for the last hour or two, and this question, which, figuratively speaking, her companion had suddenly hurled at her, brought back many unpleasant recollections. There was a little furrow between the eyes as she answered slowly,

“Oh, yes, I have seen Mr. Salmon.”

Mr. Halfday glanced at his companion as if the tone of her voice had surprised him, and then went on :—

“He told me he should call upon you this evening.”

“And he told me that he had done himself

the honour of calling upon you," Mabel remarked.

"Yes, he called," Brian said.

They walked together in silence, feeling that an embarrassing, even an objectionable topic of discourse, had arisen between them; and Brian was fully convinced that he had been impolitic in mentioning Angelo's name. Still Mr. Salmon had called, had probably offered his hand to the lady, and Brian Halfday was anxious to learn what had been the result of this love-suit. There was something cold and hard in the new manner of Miss Westbrook, and it was probable that Angelo had blundered in his courtship, and complicated matters by dragging Brian's name into the question—as the reader is already aware that he had done. The April nature of Mabel Westbrook helped to puzzle and distract him, Brian thought; she was never twice alike, hence there was no opportunity for a deliberate study of her character. Only a few minutes since there was the ripple of her musical laughter in the Summer air, and now no judge looked graver. Yes, an enigma, this young woman from America. He wished

every word of hers did not trouble his mind so much ; it was aggravating, and came between him and his studies.

He was the first to speak again. Something Angelo had said was evidently lying between them like a bar now, and that must not be. They were friends, she had acknowledged that she should look to him for help, if help were needed, and no paltry misunderstanding must set them apart, even for an instant. He had been never afraid to speak out all that was in his mind, and Mabel Westbrook should not daunt him. He looked behind at Dorcas, who kept the same distance from them, and was still struggling with a host of her own thoughts, and then said quickly,

“Did Angelo Salmon tell you why he called on me ?”

Mabel hardly cared for a leading question of this character, and she hesitated before giving him an answer. It came at length, however, and was brief enough.

“Yes,” she replied.

“What reason did he give?” asked Brian.
“Pardon me—you look surprised ; but I wish

to know. He is a weak young fellow, and prone to exaggeration, and he may have said more than he intended in a moment of excitement."

"Was he likely to be excited?"

"He was excited when he came to me."

"I do not know that I am called upon to answer you, Mr. Halfday, but I will do so, for a motive of my own."

"Thank you."

"He told me he came to you for advice about offering me his hand in marriage," she added, frankly, "and that you gave him in return very foolish counsel."

"Did he call it very foolish?" said Brian, with a surprise that was amusing in the naïve conceit which it betrayed. "I thought it impressed him a great deal at the time."

"No; but I call it very foolish," said Mabel, angrily. "I do not see the wisdom of his step in coming to you at all; he should have acted on his own judgment, as he knew better than yourself the feelings of his heart. What did you know about him or me that warranted your giving him advice in this matter?"

"It was good advice, I am still inclined to consider," Brian muttered.

"It was unwarrantable."

"I did not think you were offended with me," said Brian, thoughtfully regarding her.

"I am not offended exactly; I should not have said a word about it had you not dragged in Mr. Salmon's name, without any rhyme or reason."

"I thought you liked Mr. Salmon."

"What put that in your head?" asked Mabel, speaking as quickly as her companion.

"He is a man that a girl should like—amiable, generous, and straightforward, tolerably well educated, and immoderately modest."

It was Mabel's turn to look at him inquiringly.

"You are satirical."

"No; it is the man's true character."

"You have forgotten one attribute by which it struck you I might be tempted into an acceptance of his suit."

"What is that?"

"His wealth," answered Mabel; "Mr. Angelo Salmon is very well off, if you remember."

“Do you think I would have recommended a poor man to come to you?” said Brian.

“Then you think I am fond of money, after all?”

“No—I have seen in you too great a disregard for it,” was the reply; “but I feel assured you would not be happy as a poor man’s wife.”

“Why not?”

“You have never experienced poverty in any shape, and have no knowledge of what a struggle it is for some people to live,” said Brian; “you have been surrounded by riches all your life, and though not spoiled by them, you will never bear up against their loss. You will feel as bewildered as a child when the hard truth of your position is closer to you than it is. Here is a gentleman of position to save you from the world, and to keep you in that sphere to which you have always been accustomed.”

“And are so well calculated to adorn,” added Mabel—“that is how all this rodомontade should wind up.”

“If you consider it rodомontade, I have done,” said Brian, feeling indignant himself

at the manner in which his explanation had been received.

“ You have been talking dreadful nonsense for the last ten minutes.”

“ Oh ! have I ? ”

“ Just as you talked nonsense, and gave the worst of advice to Angelo Salmon, when you induced him to come to my house to-night.”

“ And the result of that visit ? ” asked Brian curiously.

“ It is easy to guess.”

Brian shook his head.

“ No, it is not,” he said.

“ You thought he had only to ask,” said Mabel, with a lip that trembled a little in spite of her.

“ Pardon me, but I did not think that.”

“ He was rich, and you have such an immense idea of what money can do, Mr. Halfday,” she said ironically.

“ He was a gentleman, with all his weakness,” answered Brian ; “ he would have studied hard to make you happy—you are unfit for a poor man’s home in every respect, I repeat, and

I can scarcely think you have wholly discouraged him."

"What extraordinary thoughts people trouble their brains with, when they have forgotten the art of minding their own business," said Mabel, very tartly.

Brian regarded her again with a lowering brow.

"I did wrong in advising Mr. Salmon, then?"

"Yes; you had no right to advise him to come to me."

"And the result—you have not told me the result," he continued, pertinaciously.

"I have refused him, as I would refuse any man in England who asked me to become his wife."

"You don't like Englishmen?"

"No; they are upstarts; they assume too much; they do not treat women as an American gentleman does—with respect."

"Have I shown you any disrespect?" asked Brian.

"If you ask me plainly, yes."

"Very well—I am sorry—it was uninten-

tional—that's all," he said, in rapid little sentences, "but—but you must not say I have treated you with disrespect. I will not have that. You do me a gross injustice—do you hear me, Miss Westbrook?—a very gross injustice!"

"You are shouting at me, Mr. Halfday. I am not smitten with a sudden deafness."

"Good night, madam—good night," cried Brian.

They had reached Mabel's house, and Brian walked past it with this salutation, and strode on towards Penton city without another word to her, or another thought for his sister and the will which she had found, and which was to influence more lives than her own. The indignities he had received had swept away every consideration for the great change which was at hand, and he marched back to his lair to brood on all that had been said.

"She's the same as other women, after all—irritable, unjust, and capricious," he muttered to the winds, "and I am cruelly disappointed in her. And yet as long as she lives I shall

never get this Mabel Westbrook out of my mind again."

Or out of his heart, poor Brian !

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE MONTHS.

THE stepping into a fortune of twenty thousand pounds did not tend to raise the spirits of Dorcas Halfday. From the night of the discovery of her grandfather's will, she became taciturn and thoughtful—and all the variable moods which had distinguished her, anger, jealousy, and those stronger impulses of her nature which had rendered her difficult to comprehend or control, became submerged in her deep study of the future. She was content to think, and thought did not appear of much use to her. Before her, it was evident, lay an intricate problem, and it was beyond her power to solve it. There were too

many lives and too many varied interests involved for her to see the end, let her act as she would, or as she wished.

Mabel Westbrook, always a shrewd young woman in her way, affected not to notice this change in her companion, and Dorcas in her heart was grateful for her silence. It was her brother Brian who drove her mad with his advice, who wrote to her letters which she did not answer, and who called to take her for long walks until she rebelled and refused to be preached at any longer. What the advice was which Brian tendered to his sister Mabel did not know, but thought that she could guess—and Brian did not condescend in any way to enlighten her; sometimes she fancied that Brian had never wholly forgiven her remarks upon Angelo Salmon's courtship, his manner was so strange, and he looked at her with such studious gravity of expression. He did not speak again of the will to her; but he might be waiting the result of his sister's coming into the property. He would have a great deal to say then, by way of making up for lost time, perhaps.

There were occasions even when Mabel Westbrook fancied that this odd, angular man, to whom the custody of Penton Museum was entrusted, was disposed to evade her company. After Dorcas had declined to go out with him any more, or to accept any more of his advice, he kept away from the cottage on the Penton Road for weeks together, as though his interest in Mabel were dying out, or he preferred his studies in the dusty room where he had first warned her to be cautious, to the company of one whom he had not been able to comprehend. Women had been always a riddle to him, he had not had the time or inclination to understand them; let him go back to his study of dead worlds, of facts in stone and marble, and of mysteries of primeval periods which his clear mind had had the power to pierce. These waited for his analysis, and woman was never still or twice alike. Surely this was Brian Halfday's reasoning in the lull before the storm that was rising from the lower ground, and of which no one took heed. Mabel believed that this was his reasoning, at all events, and she accepted the position philo-

sophically. Men were enigmas to her too, and they professed too much. Brian Halfday was not the earnest being who had talked to her in the churchyard at Datchet Bridge, but a new man altogether, as cold and impenetrable as the fossils in his big glass cases. The story of her mission to England had become trite and stale to him by this time, she considered—he had been aroused to action by her sudden intrusion on his hard, dry world, but it was a galvanic action, not a life that had stirred him to his heart's depths. So much the better; she had not wished for anything else—and she should not be sorry to get back to America. As for the twenty thousand pounds and its ultimate destination, she scarcely gave one moment's consideration to the question. The money never troubled her; it seemed still to belong to the Halfdays rather than to her; she had brought it from America to give them, and all that followed afterwards were parts of a strange dream to her. She had kept her promise to her grandfather and done her duty, and there was an end of it—at least, there would have been an end of it, she considered,

if this tiresome man with the long, black hair would only let the matter rest.

There were the law's delays in the matter of the proving of Adam Halfday's will, and Dorcas had, wisely enough for her own interests, placed the case in a solicitor's hand. She would have no more of Brian's interference than she could help, although it was Brian who had been appointed executor to the little document which old Adam had one day taken it into his head to concoct, on the strength of the seventy pounds which he had scraped together from his fees and perquisites at St. Lazarus. The money did not pass quickly into the hands of Dorcas Halfday, who betrayed more restlessness as time went on—who even came back, by degrees, to her old excitable self. That there was a mystery in Dorcas's life beyond Mabel's power to penetrate had been always evident, but Mabel had not asked for her confidence, and was content to wait for it. She had gained the love of this girl, and confidence would follow in good time, Mabel was assured. Meanwhile let her think of her own plans, and prepare for the journey across-sea; England was no longer a home

to her, in her own thoughts, and she was biding her time to go away.

It was in the middle of September that the law took decisive action in the case of the will of Adam Halfday. The time had come to prove the document; there had been an urgent necessity for delay, and the explanation came at last from the faltering lips of Dorcas. There had been many letters for Dorcas during the past week, and she entered the room with them and other papers in her hands. It was a quiet evening, with the house to themselves; the hour was late, and there were no visitors to interrupt them.

"Will you read every one of those, Miss Westbrook?" said Dorcas, piling them on the work-table at which Mabel sat.

"The Fates forbid!" cried Mabel, looking with amazement at the letters which had been heaped suddenly before her.

"I would rather you did," said Dorcas.

"My dear child, what good would the perusal of all those documents do me, when a few words can explain most of them?" inquired Mabel.

"A few words?" quoted Dorcas scornfully; "oh! no; words of mine are always misunderstood, or something escapes me which I ought to have kept back. I am a bad hand at explanations; please to read the letters."

"For what particular reason, Dorcas?"

"Because Brian thinks I am not to be trusted," she replied; "that I am weak, and easily led, and false; as if a girl like me could have his iron nerves and iron will, and see the world as he does, and believe not in any living man or woman in it."

"Is he so sceptical?"

"Yes, unless——"

"Go on."

"Unless it's you," said Dorcas, bluntly; "he does talk of you as if he had some faith at last, and you were a woman he could believe in. But then you brought money to us, and he thinks too much of money."

"Have you quarrelled with Brian again?"

"Almost. He interferes," she said; "he will not give me my own way, he distrusts me."

Dorcas sat down by the table, and added, impatiently,

"Please read the letters. I am waiting to take them to my room again. You will find my whole life there—the whole story I have been keeping from you for a time, but which I wanted you to know, when I thought you understood me."

"Have I understood you, Dorcas?"

"Hardly, but that's my fault."

"You are wrong. I trust you implicitly," said Mabel; "if impulsive, irritable, unjust at times, I see afterwards that you are very sorry for it."

"That's what Brian never could see," she murmured; "he never made allowance for my ill-training, bad education, worse temper, anything. Why, madam, I never had a mother, sister, any woman to ask counsel of, to stand by me as a friend, and tell me which was right and which was wrong. And oh! I wanted woman's help so badly."

Mabel's arm stole round the waist of the girl, who was weeping bitterly.

"Tell me all, Dorcas, and spare me the reading of those tiresome letters. I will believe every word you say."

“ Brian will tell me presently I never showed them to you—that I never had the courage to tell you the truth.”

“ I will answer for you that he is in error.”

“ Well, well—let me think.”

Dorcas pressed her fingers to her eyes, as if to press the tears back, and then looked long and steadily at our heroine.

“ I was going to leave this tale to Brian. It had entered my poor, weak head that it would be the wisest step for me to keep silent, and to disappear like a ghost. But then Brian would have said such bitter things.”

“ Why disappear from me ?”

“ Because I am drawn away to a new life, where my trust and duty and love take me, and you will be the last to ask me to keep away from it.”

“ Indeed !” said Mabel, thoughtfully ; “ then the one friend I have in England is to pass away ?”

“ Yes.”

“ For ever ?”

“ I hope not. I shall pray night and day we may meet soon, and that I may do you the ser-

vice on which my life is set. For oh ! madam, as God's my judge," she cried passionately, "I do not want this money. It may be a curse to me—it can never be a blessing—for I have robbed you of it."

"Yes, you are hard to understand, Dorcas," said Mabel; "now will you tell me what it all means?"

"Three words will tell that," said Dorcas, mournfully.

"Well, let me hear them."

"I am married," answered Dorcas Halfday.

CHAPTER XV.

A LOVE STORY.

MABEL WESTBROOK was not prepared for the announcement with which Dorcas had startled her. She had expected to hear of a lover and a lover's quarrel, and of Brian as the man who had helped to mar the match ; but that this weak, impulsive girl, crying and wringing her hands before her, should have taken that great step in life which leads to happiness or misery, and knows no neutral ground, was beyond her grasp of thought for the first few moments following the revelation.

"You married, child—*you* married !" she could only say.

She was sorry, too, and the tears came rushing to her own eyes at the thought of all that the marriage implied. She was sure already that trouble had come to Dorcas, possibly repentance for a rash act which there was no undoing, although the cares and griefs of existence were only just beginning. It had been a wild wooing, and the bitter fruit was to be gathered by her who had cast an eternal shadow on her own young life.

But Dorcas was not thinking of herself just then.

“So, you see, the money is his, not mine,” she said; “he comes into its possession by a husband’s right—the sum not being settled on myself in any way. Adam Halfday did not know he was leaving me a fortune—did not know I was married—and it depends now upon Michael, and what he will do. And I think, Miss Westbrook, he is to be trusted. Oh, yes, I am sure of it, if you will only give him time to do what is fair and honest. Like me,” she added with a short laugh, “he has not had much chance at present.”

“Never mind the money. Tell me of your-

self. Who is your husband? what is he? where is he? Why does he keep away from you all this time?"

"He will come for me to-morrow," answered Dorcas. "He will be released to-morrow."

"Released."

"Yes—from prison."

Mabel drew a quick breath of surprise.

"What has he done?" she inquired.

"Nothing—much," she added quaintly, after a moment's pause, "he was a soldier when he first came to St. Lazarus. His uncle was one of the pensioners, and he used to call and see him, and so we met. When grandfather found out we loved each other, he was angry and told Brian—and Brian did his best to separate us. It was the first thing my brother had ever failed in, and it made him hate us both."

"No, no, don't say that, Dorcas."

"We married without grandfather's knowledge, but Brian found it out, of course. He finds out everything."

"And he was angry at your want of confidence—at your own rashness," said Mabel; "I am not surprised."

"I said it was hate, not anger," replied Dorcas; "he set himself to find out everything about poor Michael, as if it was his business rather than my own—as if I was not content to be my Michael's wife. But he could not let us be; he discovered Michael had once deserted from his regiment, as if that mattered now! My husband had been treated badly by the commanding-officer, and he ran away, as hundreds have done before him."

"Well?"

"He was caught and sentenced," continued Dorcas. "It was his first offence, and the court-martial was not hard on him. But after we were married, he ran away a second time. For he had been treated badly again, you must understand."

"And he was caught again?" said Mabel.

"Yes, because Brian would not help him. He could have concealed him in the Museum till the morning; and he shut the door against him in the streets, where Michael was captured, poor fellow, that very night. There," cried Dorcas, with fresh excitement, "that is the brother you wonder I don't love. You see

what a life of misery and suspense he has created for me."

"And what was your husband's second sentence?" asked Mabel, without comment upon Dorcas's last remark.

"Six months' imprisonment in the cells of Penton Barracks. And they expire to-day—this very day!" cried Dorcas, clapping her hands together, "and he will be free to-morrow. Free to claim his money, to purchase his discharge—which the lawyers have already been working for—free to show he is as brave, and honourable, and unselfish as those who have looked down upon him all his life."

"Meaning your brother again. Ah! Dorcas, you are too hard upon your brother."

"Michael will be free," said Dorcas, "and we only ask your confidence for a few short weeks. Will you give it to us?"

"I do not know your husband, Dorcas," was the answer, "but you have my confidence already."

"Have confidence in him, for my sake. Take my word for once that the money——"

"Hush, hush—have we not agreed to let the money question rest?"

"But you are poor—and we are rich by your means. You——"

"Dorcas, I will hear no more of this."

"You will have faith in him," Dorcas urged again; "say—Yes."

"For your sake—Yes."

"And you will not leave England for some weeks. Say eight weeks more?"

"I will make no further promises," said Mabel, "only to say that I will not run away to America without fair notice to you and your brother."

"Very well," said Dorcas, with a sigh, "I think that will be enough to promise me just now."

She was silent, until a movement of Mabel's roused her from her reverie.

"You have not forgotten there are seventy pounds of my grandfather's money towards the expenses which we have to meet?" said Dorcas; "but it is a sum that will not go very far, and there are heavy legacy duties and probate duties, and so on, which Brian will

make good in time out of his own pocket. He told me that himself."

"Poor Brian! as if I would rob him of his savings!"

"But——"

"But I will not for ever talk about this money," said Mabel, with a petulant stamp of her little foot; "there will be time enough presently for you and me to consider what is just to both of us."

"Very well," said Dorcas, submissively.

"Now tell me of your courtship and marriage. That will be a love story in which I am sure to be interested."

"You are very good to say so."

"Does your father know of this marriage?"

"I do not know my father yet," she answered, so mournfully that Mabel hastened to change the subject.

"And this soldier husband of yours—how old is he?"

"He was twenty-one last August."

"So young!" exclaimed Mabel. "Why, you were boy and girl when you were married."

"Almost," said Dorcas, blushing; "but we

understood each other's hearts, and did not marry in haste. It was a long courtship for us."

"Indeed! Now tell me all about it."

Dorcas was not loth to respond; she had found a sympathetic listener in Mabel Westbrook, who was anxious to hear this new love story for herself. It was the first time in Dorcas Halfday's life that she could tell the truth of her strong love; it was the first man or woman who had ever cared to hear it. There was an outburst of confidence at once—the natural, unrestrained confidence of girlhood, which had, in Dorcas, been ever checked by the grave, matter-of-fact minds about her.

It was a common-place love story, with which we have no occasion to trouble the reader in detail; but Dorcas spoke of it as a strange romance, and painted her love in those glowing colours which love ever gives to the fancy-picture it reveres. A chance meeting leading on to appointments—to affection; and then discovery precipitating a crisis that, with more tact and consideration, might have been

avoided. A foolish and a secret marriage, a soldier husband, a deserter; a story that might have ended miserably, even tragically, and the sequel of which was still difficult to guess at.

This latter thought crossed Mabel Westbrook's mind, not that of the girl by her side, and with her soul in her confession. To Dorcas this was the end of all trials and temptations, and the beginning of the bliss to which she had looked forward and wondered when it would come, and in what guise. Here was the romance which her brother would have marred, and it was ending pleasantly and brightly, and with a happy-ever-afterwards *denouement*. There were no doubts to cross her, and the faith she had had in the boy-lover remained with the young husband whom she was to meet again to-morrow.

Yes, Dorcas was very weak, thought Mabel, but very trusting; and thus, altogether, womanly. Very sanguine too, and knowing, after all, so little of real life and human nature that the elder girl could only shudder at the intensity and pathos of her rhapsody.

"I hope he will be always good to you," said Mabel, "for you deserve it for your faith in him."

"He has faith in me too," said Dorcas. "He loves me very much."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I was a wild, uncared-for girl when he took a fancy to me; I was not worth a penny in the world, so he did not come running after my money," said Dorcas.

"It is pleasant to be sought for one's self," replied Mabel, musingly.

"Oh! I know of whom you are thinking," cried Dorcas.

"Of whom?"

"Mr. Angelo Salmon, and the night when he came here. You are beginning to wonder where he is, and why he has not been to see you since. Oh! Miss Westbrook, if you don't mind my saying so, I am sure you love him," said Dorcas, timidly, and as if expectant of a tender revelation in return for her own.

"Hush, hush, Dorcas! I was not thinking of Mr. Salmon; I am never likely to fall in love

with him—I respect him too much,” she added, almost satirically.

“You would not love anybody you did not——” began Dorcas, in a wondering tone, before she broke into a merry laugh, and said, “Ah! you are jesting with me. I am so pleased to see your smiles again!”

“Have I not been smiling lately?”

“Not in the old bright way, I fancy.”

“Perhaps not,” said Mabel in reply; “but I did not know you were keeping a careful watch over me. However, Dorcas, I am not grieving for the absence of any man.”

“But you miss Mr. Salmon a little—do you not?” asked the pertinacious girl.

“I should miss any friend a little,” answered Mabel, “even though I recommended him to go away for a while.”

“Yes, as you did Mr. Salmon. But——”

“And we will talk no more of this, Dorcas,” said Mabel, interrupting her. “The hour is late, and you have business of importance to transact to-morrow. Where do you meet your brother? At the Museum?—or,” she added,

after a little pause, "will he call for you here?"

"At the Museum," answered Dorcas.

Mabel asked no further questions, and Dorcas gathered her letters together preparatory to departure. When she was ready, she dropped suddenly on her knees before her mistress, and said,

"I have not been so bad a girl, have I?"

"No, child, no."

"A little wilful—perhaps a great deal too much so; but never meaning any harm; and only loving my Michael too well."

"He and you will love each other too well, I hope, to the end of your lives," said Mabel. "There, good night."

"Good night. And you *will* trust me and him?"

"Yes."

"Whatever Brian may say presently—to trust us," said Dorcas, "and think the best of us. God bless you, Miss Mabel, and make you as happy as myself! For all past kindness, interest in me, love for me—let me say love!—I give you the thanks of my heart."

“That sounds like a farewell, Dorcas.”

“No, no—not yet,” answered Dorcas, as she rose from her knees, and, after a sudden kiss on Mabel’s cheek, went quickly from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRIAN BRINGS THE NEWS.

DORCAS HALFDAY left early the next morning to keep her appointment with her brother. There was to be a preliminary conference in Brian's room at the Museum—a last ordeal for Dorcas, perhaps—before they met the solicitor at the district registry at Penton, and a certain Michael Sewell stepped from his soldier's cell into the foreground, and took his rich young wife to his arms. She did not go away in high spirits; only two deep red spots on her cheeks were evidence of the excitement which it had become her task to suppress. She scarcely spoke to Mabel. Strangely

enough, with the morning following her confession there seemed to have arisen an embarrassing reserve. A few words from Mabel would have broken through this; but Mabel did not make them. She was glad to think for herself, and of herself; and it was only when Dorcas was on the point of departure that the old confidence was shown. Dorcas Halfday was as white as a ghost then.

"I am going," she said, very slowly, and in a low voice. "Have you anything more to say to me?"

"No, Dorcas. Except," Mabel added, suddenly, "that I would be calm and patient in your place to-day."

"It is hardly possible."

"I hope you will not return to me and say you have exchanged hard words with your brother," Mabel said.

"I will put up with all his reproaches, if you wish it," answered Dorcas, submissively.

"I wish it. But why should he reproach you?"

"He will reproach all of us," replied Dorcas, "the lawyer, Michael, and myself. He will tell

us we are all that is bad; but I will not say a word in reply. I have promised you."

She put both her hands in Mabel's, and looked wistfully at her again.

"You remember all I said last night, Miss Mabel?"

"Yes."

"And all you have promised?"

"Yes," said Mabel, for the second time.

"Thank you," she answered, with strange humility.

Mabel regarded her curiously, and Dorcas looked away from her, as if afraid to meet her gaze.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" Mabel asked. "Is there lurking behind all this complication the shadow of another mystery?"

"Why should you think so?"

"You look disturbed."

"Heaven only knows what is lurking in the background; but I have said I have faith in its being happiness. Pray believe as I do," she cried, with all her old impulsiveness.

"Very well, Dorcas, I will try."

"Good-bye."

Another wistful look at Mabel Westbrook.

"May I kiss you, as I did last night," she said, "as a friend?"

"To be sure," was the reply. "Have you not been always my friend? Did not your careful nursing of me at Datchet Bridge make you my friend for life?"

"Thank you for saying as much to me—at the last, like this."

Dorcas kissed her, and Mabel saw that there were tears brimming in her eyes. She did not trouble Dorcas with a repetition of a question to which an answer somewhat evasive had been returned; she would leave it to a more fitting opportunity. On the brink of her good fortune, Brian's sister was hardly herself, and the time was not ripe to question her too closely. Dorcas's life was beginning in earnest for the first time. The husband was returning in the golden sunrise, and the heaven above them was radiant with glorious colouring. The sun was in her eyes, and this poor being was dazzled and blinded by it, and could not see her way yet. The hour was unfitting to solve new mysteries, or to grow suspicious that the

old had not been fully explained. Let Mabel Westbrook believe as Dorcas did, if it were possible. She had promised to try.

Mabel followed Dorcas to the door, to see the last of her.

Outside in the country road, walking up and down, as if for warmth and exercise, the quick glance of Mabel Westbrook detected the bent figure of a brother of St. Lazarus.

"Can that be Peter Scone?" asked Mabel.

"Yes, he is waiting for me," answered Dorcas; "it is an odd escort into Penton city, but he insists upon it."

"Why did you not tell me he was going with you?"

"The wretch!" cried Dorcas, with sudden vehemence, "as if I would let him trouble your mind as he does mine."

"That is not confidence between us."

"You would not read the letters last night; there were his among the number, asking, begging, threatening for his hush-money?"

"Hush-money?"

"Yes. I promised him money if he would keep silence as to my father's attack upon him,"

explained Dorcas. "I did not know the whole truth of that story then ; but as it led towards the discovery of the will it does not matter much. Save that, when restitution comes," she added, "you will be much the poorer woman."

"Oh !—yes," said Mabel wearily, almost doubtfully. She had no thought of the money coming back, by any means, into her possession, and an allusion to it displeased her, the reader is aware.

Dorcas went into the high-road and joined Peter Scone, and in this singular company she turned her back upon the home which she had shared with Mabel Westbrook. Mabel watched the meeting, even faintly responded to the raising of Peter Scone's hat, a large hard hat, which he wore on special occasions, and when off duty at St. Lazarus, and then closed the door and returned to her little sitting-room.

"What will be the end of this?" Mabel said to herself, "and what am I waiting for, I wonder? Surely something strange will find its way here before the day is out."

Mabel Westbrook, like most women, it is evident, had her superstitious moments, al-

though it was natural that Dorcas's half confidence should give her mental food for speculation. Dorcas had asked for implicit trust, but then Dorcas was unlike other women, and had had a strange world of her own to grow up in. Mabel did not distrust her, at all events, and she had the patience to wait, she thought, until Dorcas returned, and threw more light upon the antecedents.

She was not quite certain as to the amount of patience she possessed when the day had passed, and the shadows of the Autumn night were upon her. She had expected Dorcas home before the evening. The husband would have to return to the barracks, and the brother's company had never been desirable; and when it struck nine by a time-piece on the mantelshelf, Mabel grew uneasy, and for the first time, doubtful, whether she should look upon the face of her young companion again. Dorcas's impulse of the preceding evening, her reserve before quitting the house that morning, suggested at last a new and strong suspicion, which the deepening night only helped to strengthen.

There was a knock at the door at last, and Mabel took courage from it, although it was a noisy summons, and unlike Dorcas's general appeal for admittance to the establishment. Mabel Westbrook was over-anxious; she rose and peeped into the narrow passage as the landlady opened the door, she came forward tremblingly as a man's deep voice mentioned her own name, and Brian Halfday stepped into the house.

"Oh! she is not coming back?" cried Mabel at once.

"No, Miss Westbrook, she is not coming back," answered Brian.

"I was afraid so. I have been expecting this bad news."

Mabel returned to the room, and Brian Halfday followed her and closed the door behind him, skilfully cutting off the entrance of the landlady, who was also interested in the case, and wanted her information on the spot.

Mabel sank into a chair she had recently quitted, and pressed one fair hand across her eyes, whilst Brian took off his hat, and rather impetuously pitched it into the corner. The

hat was a bad one and deserved shabby treatment, possibly—at all events its owner had no respect for it. Brian had come into the room looking hard and grim enough, but the first expression of Mabel's regret and disappointment softened his features wondrously.

He did not sit down, but stood on the hearth-rug, with his hand upon the mantelpiece, regarding her with great interest.

"Bad news," he said, echoing Mabel's last words; "is it bad news that tells you Dorcas has left for good?"

"Why should it not be?"

"It was a false position. She was not true to you."

"I don't know, said Mabel, hesitatingly; "I think she was true, although not inclined to trust me altogether. Does she send any message to me?"

"Yes."

"Why do you keep it from me?" asked Mabel almost sharply.

He winced at her new tone, before he said,

"She bade me tell you she would write in a few days. She desired your best thoughts

for her until you heard from her again."

"And that is all?"

"That is all," responded Brian.

"I will await her letter before I judge her hastily for this sudden flight," said Mabel.

"You are always generous."

"No, I am simply just. Where is she now?"

"With her father."

Mabel was surprised at the announcement, and looked quickly towards Brian.

"Mr. William Halfday has fully proved, to the satisfaction of his daughter, and Mr. Sewell, his son-in-law, the *bona fides* of his past transactions," Brian drily continued. "He was the first to hear of a will being in existence. He came to me with the news, but I received him churlishly, he tells his friends; he quarrelled with Peter Scone about it, and, for his daughter's sake, he went straight to his solicitor, Mr. Eversham, and begged that gentleman to make every inquiry, and to cease all efforts to obtain letters of administration for himself, until the mystery was cleared up. You see, Miss Westbrook, there is a considerable amount of unselfishness in our family, after all."

An expression of pain passed over Mabel's face.

"I am tired of your satire," she murmured. "Speak to me plainly, and in sober earnest, Mr. Halfday."

He accepted the reproof with strange humility, and attempted no defence.

"Dorcas has gone away with her father. Michael Sewell thought it the more natural proceeding, and she was anxious to oblige her husband," he continued; "in a few weeks the discharge of that gentleman from military service will be obtained, and he will have time to consider how to act with regard to yourself. Meanwhile, Miss Westbrook, he removes her from the sphere of your influence, as the wiser policy."

"Is this satire too?" asked Mabel.

"No, it is the plain truth, which I am deeply sorry to convey to you," he answered.

"Because——"

"Because it adds to the shadows by which we are surrounded—because," he added, more passionately, "the name of Halfday will, every hour of your life, grow more hateful to you."

"No," said Mabel, "it will not."

"It should ; we have embittered your life—we have robbed you—we have left you defenceless."

"Oh ! I can defend myself, I hope ; and for what has happened neither you nor your sister is to blame."

"You are poor."

"Yes."

"You are very poor—you know you are," he said, with his voice raised to a higher pitch ; "you are keeping back from me the exact position in which you stand."

"Surely you do not consider yourself my father-confessor," said Mabel, half saucily, half angrily.

"I consider you, Miss Westbrook, as the one motive of my life."

Mabel coloured, and looked away from him.

"I told you this in the churchyard of Datchet Bridge, and I have sworn it with every day that has passed since. You are a deeply injured woman, Heaven knows, and hate me as you may, as you must, I am pledged to live for you and your future interests. Therefore," he

added, in a less impetuous tone, and, indeed, assuming so suddenly a precise and business air, that Mabel's keen sense of humour brought a smile to her lips, "I shall feel obliged by your informing me how much money you have left in the world?"

CHAPTER XVII.

BRIAN IS WEAK.

THE smile which flickered for a moment on the lips of Mabel Westbrook was displeasing to Brian Halfday. He was a man who looked at life too seriously, it was evident.

"This is a grave question, which I wish you to consider gravely," he said, in half reproof.

"It is a question which I hardly think I am called upon to answer," answered Mabel more thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes, you are," was his flat contradiction.

"Go on, Mr. Halfday. I shall be pleased if you will explain."

"All the embarrassments of your present

position," he began, when she cut him short by saying rapidly,

"I have never confessed to any embarrassments."

"All the embarrassments of your present position, Miss Westbrook, are due to a rash interference with the business of people unworthy of your interest," he continued, paying no heed to her interruption—"people whom you came a long journey to ally yourself with, and whom there is no shaking from you again."

"What has this to do with your first inquiry?" asked Mabel.

"Your mission was a failure; the family, taken as a whole, was ungrateful for your sympathy and greedy for your money, and, as a representative of that family, I have treated you with a scant amount of courtesy."

Mabel did not respond to this half-apology; she did not know what to say on the spur of the moment, and after waiting, as if for her answer, he continued—

"Still, on this occasion, Miss Westbrook, be good enough to understand that I represent the family of the Halfdays collectively—that

I am speaking of them as well as myself."

"Are you instructed in their name to come to me?"

He went on in his usual aggravating way, she thought, and without attending to her inquiries.

"It is no secret you are ruined by paying over to us money to which we were never entitled," he said, "and it is our turn to be of assistance to you in any way we think best. It would be a false modesty, another serious mistake, if you are not frank with us."

"With you, you mean?" said Mabel quietly.

"Say with me, if you wish," he replied. "I have already told you I represent the family that has done you all this harm."

"Well, go on," said Mabel. "Probably the sooner we comprehend the position the better."

"Then, to be brief and plain with you, how much money have you left in the world?" he asked.

"It is an odd question to ask a lady," answered Mabel, with the smile once more difficult to repress, "but I will tell you, as you claim a right to know."

She rose, walked to her desk, took out her bank-book, which she opened, glanced at, closed, and put back, and then returned to her seat, and faced Mr. Brian Halfday's eager stare at her without flinching.

"Forty-seven pounds, fourteen shillings and ninepence," she replied, with great composure.

Brian Halfday's face became paler at this announcement, and his black eyes seemed starting from his head.

"No more than that," he murmured.

"It will pay my debts and take me to America, where I shall not want friends."

"You have not any great or dear friends there," said Brian.

"How do you know?" asked Mabel, a little angrily.

"You have talked more than once of settling in England," answered Brian, "and you have spoken of leaving America for good without regret."

"I thought I was an heiress," said Mabel, "and should make many friends here in good time."

"Friends are easily bought, you think?"

"Friends are not easily made by a woman standing alone in the world," was the reply ; "and in America I am at least sure of true sympathy, and of homes and helping hands being offered me by the old friends of James Westbrook. The world over there is not so full of uncertainty as this."

"There must be some dear friend in the background, after all, and you have not told me of him," muttered Brian.

"Perhaps there is—perhaps there is not," said Mabel, enigmatically ; "I am not bound to tell you everything."

"And that explains much, of course," he added, half absently.

"What does it explain?" was Mabel's inquiry.

"Your indifference to——but no, I will not worry you with that subject again."

"What subject?"

"It distresses you. You can guess it."

"My indifference to your advice to marry young Mr. Salmon, you mean," said Mabel, confidently ; "yes, I did not care to hear of

that from you or him. And it distressed me—yes.”

“It seemed for the best,” said Brian, thoughtfully regarding her; “he was fond of you, and an amiable gentleman.”

“Are you going to advise me to accept him after all?” asked Mabel, her face flushing with a new excitement; “have you seen him again? do you come here this time as his intercessor? If so—I shall hate him—there!”

“No, I am not here to speak for him—I have not seen him since that night he came to you—I hear they are anxious about him at the Hospital.”

“Indeed. Has he not been home?”

“Neither at home, nor at his chambers in town—but we are forgetting the business of the evening.”

“Has he not written to his father or mother?” she asked, still curious.

“Not a word, I believe—but you *are* really interested in his absence, your face betrays anxiety and alarm,” said Brian.

“I had no idea I possessed such a speaking countenance,” answered Mabel, very satirically

now; "but I am concerned for a missing friend, naturally."

"You own to his being a friend?"

"Yes—and the friend I can trust."

Brian's face darkened at this. She had not intended to convey the impression that her visitor was not to be trusted, but he took it to heart as though his presence had suggested the comparison between Angelo Salmon and himself.

"I will endeavour to discover him if you wish it," he said in a deeper tone of voice.

"He is away by his own choice—why should I wish it?"

"It is not for me to say," said Brian, carelessly.

"I advised him to take a holiday, I remember."

"He is quick to respond," replied Brian. "Well, it is satisfactory to find you can give advice to Mr. Salmon as well as I. Still, if he follows everybody's advice in this fashion, he will assuredly come to grief."

"Shall we proceed to business, Mr. Halfday?" was the quiet inquiry here.

"If you please," he replied.

For the first time during the interview he drew a chair towards her, and sat down. His manner had changed ; it was harder and colder, if marked by more deference towards his listener, and there was a set expression on his features difficult to comprehend.

"I have already said, Miss Westbrook, I represent on this occasion the family that has benefited by your egregious error," he began, with great formality, "and it is purposed to place at your disposal, and to meet those demands which have necessarily arisen on account of recent losses, the sum of one thousand pounds, being the first instalment of the debt due from the Halfdays to yourself."

"I cannot accept it," said Mabel ; "I——"

"It is so small a sum in comparison with the amount to which you are entitled—which you flung away with so little consideration for yourself, or for justice—that you are bound in honour, Miss Westbrook, to accept it," said Brian, with less formality in his address to her.

"No, no, no," said Mabel, shaking her head

energetically ; "I am not bound in honour to take one farthing of this money back."

"There is no alternative ; take it you must."

"Not in this way, or without a fair explanation of where the money comes from."

"Miss Westbrook, the money was paid to your account at Penton Bank this afternoon. Your balance at present stands at one thousand and forty-seven pounds, fourteen shillings and ninepence," he said.

"You—you have dared to do this!" exclaimed Mabel.

"The example was set us in the case of Adam Halfday—and by yourself."

"But I can restore this money—I will write a cheque to-morrow for the amount and send it to you," said Mabel.

"I will pay it to your account again, I swear !"

"Then your father or Mr. Sewell must take the money, as representatives of the family to which you have alluded so constantly to-night," said Mabel, with great gravity of demeanour, but watching Brian Halfday very closely.

His colour changed again, and he rose from

his chair in evident alarm at this last proclamation.

“Good God! you would never send the money to them?”

“Why should I not?”

“They are rich already by your rashness. And—and this is really yours. It is only one-twentieth part of your own money back. You would never give it to them, of all people in the world!”

“Mr. Halfday,” said Mabel, “will you let me trust you?—will you teach me from this night to believe in you implicitly?”

It was a strange question, and uttered with great earnestness. Brian could not face the steady light shining at him from the depths of Mabel’s full grey eyes. For the first time he felt cowed and disarmed, and at another’s mercy.

“I hope you will believe in me in time,” he murmured, looking away from her.

“I want to believe in you now.”

“Well?”

“I want you to tell me all the truth—to disguise nothing. Will you?”

He could not resist her pleading; he had never felt the strong stern man in her presence as he had done in other men and women's. She exercised a mastery over him beyond his powers of analysis; from the dry depths of his inner consciousness there had been evolved romance and poetry, the romance of noble aspirations and sweet poetry of self-sacrifice.

"I will tell you everything you wish," he answered.

"This money, then?—this one thousand pounds paid away to-day? Do they know anything of it?" inquired Mabel.

"Who are *they*?"

"Your sister and her husband—your father?"

Brian shrugged his shoulders and looked away from her, as a child might have done caught by its schoolmistress in a flagrant omission of its duty.

"Do they know anything of it?" he repeated, like a child still anxious to gain time for mature consideration, and taking refuge in vain repetitions.

"Yes," said Mabel.

“Well—not at present,” came the response at length.

“And the money is yours? in some way or other you have obtained a thousand pounds for me?”

“Yes,” he said again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRIAN IS BOLD.

HAVING confessed the truth, Brian Halfday looked unflinchingly at Mabel Westbrook again. He was there to argue, to reason, to defend himself, to do anything but take back the money which he had placed at her disposal.

“Why have you done this?” she asked, in a low voice; “I have never helped you in any way. I have been always opposed to you. You and I have been almost enemies at times.”

“Before you trusted in me implicitly,” he answered, with considerable emphasis, “as you do now?”

“As I do now,” was her reply.

His face became very bright on the instant.

"It is pleasant to be trusted," he murmured ;
"it is the first time in my life that I have experienced the sensation. A new life dates from it altogether."

"But——"

"But you will destroy the illusion—dash me to the ground completely—if you ask me to take that money back," he cried ; "there will be no trust—no confidence, if you will not let me help you."

"What do I want with a thousand pounds?"

"A woman without money is at the mercy of the world. A man can work for more."

"You have promised me, Brian Halfday, to tell me everything I wish!" Mabel reminded him.

"Did I say everything?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything more to ask of me?"

"Certainly there is."

"Then it was a rash promise," he said restlessly ; "I should have been upon my guard."

"No, no, don't conceal anything from me," said Mabel imploringly ; "let me, for once in your life, know you as you are. You have been

a riddle to me—I have not seemed to understand you.”

“I was vain enough to think your faith in me began at Datchet Bridge,” said Brian, softly.

“It began—yes. I lost the old belief in your being my enemy. I felt you might at any time become my friend—but you always remained a mystery that I could not comprehend.”

“And now?” he asked eagerly.

“And now I trust you with my whole heart—for I think I read all that is in yours.”

“Ah! that is impossible,” he muttered.

“Therefore, Mr. Halfday, with no secrets between us ever again, tell me where you got this money?”

Brian Halfday hesitated for an instant, and then one of his rare laughs escaped him. The position was becoming brighter and lighter, and the shadows were stealing from the scene.

“You will not ask me to take this money back?”

“You will let me pay you when I am rich again—I mean very rich? When Dorcas, or

Dorcas's husband, for instance, insist upon my receiving back a fair share of the capital at present in their possession."

"Yes—then," he answered.

"Now tell me how you were able to lend me a thousand pounds?"

"You are a very curious girl," he said; "what does it matter, so that I have been able to help you?"

"I asked you for your confidence," she said reproachfully.

"You shall have it. I saved the money—most of it, that is," he added, with a reserve.

"From your small income—impossible!"

"How do you know what my income is?" asked Brian, not a little surprised at her last remark.

"Mr. Gregory Salmon told me," replied Mabel.

"Ah! yes—he is a man who knows everything except how to write sermons; which reminds me I borrowed a book of you at Datchet Bridge. A terrible book that——"

"You are wandering from the subject intentionally, Mr. Halfday."

"You will have no mercy on me," he replied. "How did I save so much money, you ask?"

"Yes."

"Upon my honour, it is hardly a fair question," he said, laughing again; "but there are to be no secrets between us."

"Go on, please."

"And I may ask a few questions of you in return—as forcibly and abruptly as I have asked questions of my sister before this," he said.

"I don't think I have a secret in the world now," replied Mabel; "but proceed. I am very curious."

"I had saved up eight hundred pounds at the end of last month," said Brian at last; "I am of a saving turn of mind—the miserly habits of my grandfather are inherent in me, my expenses are few, I live rent free, I eat little, and I drink less."

"But from your salary, it seems to be impossible you should have saved eight hundred pounds," said Mabel, thoughtfully.

"I did not say I had saved that sum from my salary."

Mabel looked hard at him again.

"Another mystery?" she said.

"No; I am going to tell you what few people in Penton are aware of—what I have kept to myself as much as possible, having no friends in the world who would have been interested by the communication."

"What can it possibly be?" said Mabel, breathlessly.

He laughed again at her anxiety. Yes, the shadows were surely falling into the background of his life. Here was a woman interested in him and his pursuits.

"I write," he said.

"Oh! I am glad to hear it!" exclaimed Mabel; "you are clever—you are a real author—you write books that people actually pay you for? How delightful!"

"Yes, I write books and am actually paid," said Brian.

"Novels—poems—histories—what kind of books?"

"Books and pamphlets that would weary

you to death to wade through," he said, half sadly, half drily—"pages of heavy matter and ponderous detail, on which the bright eyes of women seldom rest."

"Scientific?"

"Dry essays on our mother earth chiefly, with fragments here and there of county history, by way of a change of work, when hard study of dead worlds becomes too much for me. I have been fortunate in earning money, if no fame, by these pursuits," he added modestly, "and I love the labour of the pen with all my soul."

He spoke with enthusiasm, and Mabel had never seen that thin wan face with so much light upon it.

"And you have studied this for me," she said, "for the poor reward, the miserable satisfaction, of lending me the savings of your life."

"There is no higher reward I want," he replied; "you have been upon my conscience—I am happier than I have ever been to-night."

"And poorer too."

"I can earn money easily now," he said, somewhat proudly; "I am known in London;

the early struggles of one who writes for bread are past for ever. I think it is not wholly unlikely that I may even die a tolerably rich man."

"Not if you fling your money about in this reckless fashion," said Mabel archly, "and trust such a stranger as I am."

"Stranger," he repeated mournfully "ah! don't say that."

"No, but I will say this, I cannot accept all your money."

"Hush, hush; you must not break faith with me, and render me unhappy to-night," he said; "this is a night for ever to be remembered gratefully."

"I don't see why."

"You trust me—you believe in me?"

"Yes," Mabel replied; "but this two hundred pounds extra and above your savings, what do I want with it? Why should I let you run into debt for me?"

"My creditor will not harass me for his money back, and I shall earn it before the year dies out. Please let me be, Miss Westbrook. You never cared to talk too long about money;

it is, at the best, one of the most miserable topics under the sun, God knows!"

"And yet what a deal we have had to say about it!"

"Ay," asserted Brian, "we have never met without some sharp words on the question. But you always began it, if you remember."

"No—I don't remember that," said Mabel.

"Let us talk of something else before I say good-night. May I?"

"What do you wish to talk about?" asked Mabel.

"Yourself."

"I am afraid we have been talking of that all the evening," she said.

"But you have promised to answer all my questions—and it is my turn to be exceedingly curious," he urged.

Mabel regarded him with trepidation.

"You will ask nothing of me I cannot answer fairly?" she said.

"There was to be no reserve," was his reply, "there are to be from this day no secrets between us."

"N—no," she answered hesitatingly.

“Very well,” said Brian, in almost a business tone again, though it was an affectation of business that Mabel would have more quickly perceived had she not been nervous as to what was coming next; “and now the name of the bank in which all the money has been lost?”

Mabel told him, and he booked the title in a little note-book which he took from his breast pocket.

“Thank you,” he said, “and now the name of THE MAN.”

CHAPTER XIX.

AN HONEST CONFESSION.

IT was a bold question for a man like Brian Halfday to put to this high-spirited maiden from the States, but its very boldness had its effect.

Mabel was for a moment or two speechless with astonishment, then she ejaculated—

“*The man!* What man?”

“He who has stood between you and Angelo Salmon—whom you love, and are going back to?”

Mabel coloured at the peremptory tone which he suddenly assumed and replied—

“You have no right to ask me such a question as that.”

“There are to be no more secrets, Miss Westbrook,” he said, “and I shall arrive at a clearer understanding of your character, be able to act more thoroughly for you, and *him*, if you will keep your word with me. Trust me as your brother. I am not asking from motives of idle curiosity—and there should be no affectation of reserve to sink you to the level of your sex.”

It was a compliment paid to Mabel at the expense of her sex, and she knew not how to reply. She was glad he thought highly of her, and yet was angry and sorry that he had had but a poor opinion of women all his life. She had pledged herself to speak, she wondered a little why he was anxious to know, but she was half disposed to be offended with him again for thinking that under any circumstances he was justified in making the inquiry. Surely it was not his business—and the loan of a thousand pounds to her did not warrant him in assuming the airs of a dictator.

“What makes you think there is a gentleman anywhere, for whom I care at all?” she asked.

“I am sure there is,” he answered positively.

“Why are you sure?” she inquired also; “it is only a little while ago you professed your inability to understand women, and now you pretend to read all that is in my heart.”

“I do not understand women, Miss Westbrook—but I know they are very positive, very obstinate, very eccentric when a lover is at their feet, who is all the world to them.”

“You did not discover that truth in the study of mother earth,” said Mabel.

“No. In the study of mother nature.”

“Have I been very positive, obstinate, and eccentric?”

“Decidedly.”

Mabel considered this reply.

“Probably I have,” she said at length.

“You have acted rashly,” he continued in mild reproof, “no one would have so seriously embarrassed herself, and complicated matters so inextricably as you have. And,” he added, “if it had not been for a prior engagement, a gentle, unselfish woman would have naturally responded to that attachment which Gregory Salmon’s son evinced.”

"I don't know that," said Mabel, shaking her head.

"I have answered your question—now reply to mine. See, I am waiting to enter the happy man's name in my note-book," said Brian, with a rare exhibition of facetiousness, as he held his book up for inspection.

"I shall never tell you his name, to begin with," said Mabel, looking at the carpet, "because, in the first place, there is no engagement between him and me at present. But there is a gentleman—oh! a long, long way from here, far away in the backwoods of my native land—whom I could learn to love, and who I think might learn to love me in return."

"And you are going back to him?"

"I shall return to Penton, and he may meet me there some day."

"Will he know of your return, then?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

"At once."

"He must love you very deeply."

"Ah! I am not certain of that," answered

Mabel, "and I only say I may learn to love him in good time."

"This is a three-cornered kind of confession," said Brian, thoughtfully, "but I comprehend you. Very clearly too," he added, slowly dropping his note-book into his breast-pocket.

"You will say nothing of this to Dorcas?" suggested Mabel.

"I shall not see Dorcas. Besides, I have no confidence in her."

"You must not judge her too hastily."

"And we are speaking to ourselves—not to the world," added Brian. "It is for this reason that I wish you all the happiness in life—and I see only a little distance from you that happiness approaching. For he *must* love you—this man!"

"Why?" asked Mabel, softly.

"You are different from other women—since you have been away from America, he must have missed you so much," replied Brian.

"Why did he not come after me, and keep me from the terrible temptation of the Salmon?"

Brian stared hard at this sudden exhibition of levity.

"You are piqued," he said, "you and he have quarrelled."

"We have had a few words."

"Is he rich?"

Mabel hesitated, and then encountering Brian Halfday's inquiring gaze, said quickly—

"Yes—very rich."

"What is he?"

"In the dry-goods store line," was the prompt reply.

"That is an extraordinary business for the backwoods," remarked Brian.

"I did not say his business was in the backwoods, but that he was there at the present time. Don't criticise me—don't talk of this any more, please, Mr. Halfday—I have told you more than I cared to tell already, but you have dragged this secret from me, for no earthly good. Spare me now—I have been tried to-day severely."

"Yes, yes," said Brian in response to an appeal which had been uttered with great rapidity and considerable excitement, "I am an intermeddler, and have worried you with questions I had no business to ask. You are

quite right ; I am an inquisitive man, and want to know too much. Forgive me, Miss Westbrook—I will not trouble you again in this way.”

“ Thank you,” murmured Mabel.

“ And as there are no secrets between us,” he continued, “ as from this day’s date we stand on new ground together, with confidence in each other, I am going to tell you one more truth. It will put you on your guard against me—it will warn you of the power you may exercise for good or evil ; it will show you, even, how a hard man like me can soften to a fool under the spell of a fair woman’s influence.”

He was standing before her, with his face full of trouble, but she had not the courage to look up at him, or arrest his words. He was so terribly in earnest that she was afraid to speak.

“ When I came here this evening, it was for the first time, with a faint hope that I might win upon your heart some day,” he said ; “ and you might give me hope to win it, if I were strong and patient. You had become suddenly my dream and my ambition—but God knows

the dream is over, and the ambition is at an end. That is why I tell you."

"This is not sparing me, Mr. Halfday," said Mabel, reproachfully, "this is ungenerous of you at the last."

"It is as well you should know," replied Brian; "and you have done me a kind service in telling me of the lover in America, for I go back to my old life none the worse for the collapse of an air-bubble in the sun. I was not selfish, at least; I felt you were beyond me when Angelo Salmon told me how he loved you, and I have only seemed a little nearer since your rejection of his suit. I have thought of approaching you by slow degrees, and of being loved by slow degrees in return. There was no securing you by a *coup de théâtre*, and now that there is no securing you at all, I shall be a practical, matter-of-fact man for ever afterwards. But for ever your friend, Mabel Westbrook, who talks in this romantic strain for the first and last time in his life, and who makes a clean breast of his folly before he says good night."

He held out both his hands, and she saw the

movement and put hers within them, and without looking up at him. Again the strong firm clasp of his hands startled her, and yet assured her of his earnestness, and strength of will, and faith in her.

“You are not offended?” he asked in a low tone.

“No,” she replied in as low a tone as himself.

“If I have spoken out too plainly, forgive me, and think no more of it,” he continued, “for I could not keep the truth back, after all that you had told me. And it is the solemn truth!—I shall not grieve, and you need not be afraid of my obtrusiveness. I am very strong, thank Heaven, and I say again that from to-night I am simply your true friend, whom you are to trust as long as you live! There—God bless you, girl—and good night again.”

He kissed her hands, like a gentleman of the old school rather than a geologist of the new, and Mabel did not shrink from his reverent caress. When he was gone, she cast herself upon the couch and shed many strange tears, and did not feel, despite her grief, that she was

particularly unhappy, although she had not told all the truth to Brian Halfday, and was to deceive him afresh to-morrow, when he might learn to despise her even for her want of trust in him.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER-THOUGHTS.

ROMANCE does not live long in the heart of a practical man. It is a temporary and uncomfortable ailment, which he is bound in justice to his character to set aside, more especially when there is nothing for the ideal to subsist on. This was Brian Halfday's theory, and he believed in it, and in his power to go back at any time to his old life—as if to retrace one's steps were possible to the sons of men. He went home to his stuffy top room in the Penton Museum a grave and determined being ; he had made up his mind to begin again to-morrow as if nothing had happened to lure his thoughts from those studies by which he

had earned money, and which seemed, even to him, to point towards a name by which the world might know him presently. He had been wrong to swerve from the groove in which his life had been running easily till Mabel Westbrook's advent; he was sorry to confess it, but he had been for the first time in his life a fool.

He confessed it again when he was at home and had lighted his lamp, and set his papers in order for an immediate dash at work. But the work was beyond him, and he contented himself with staring at it and at the opposite wall by turns, finding that the woman he loved was too strong for the fossils and earths he loved too.

Too strong for that night at least, but these were early times to shake off the sense of disappointment which he felt despite his philosophy. To-morrow Brian Halfday would be himself again. Nothing had happened which he had not expected, surely. It was unlikely that this good-looking American girl should think of loving a man who had grown old so much before his time as he had, who had not one attribute that might stand as a fair passport to

that ladies' society which he had studiously shunned until a goddess had surprised him in his den. It was as well that it was quickly over, and Mabel Westbrook had owned to a lover already. It settled the whole affair completely, and rendered the path ahead of him smooth, and free from pitfalls, and only a little dull! That last feeling he should get over—all men were dull at times, and his studies would give him tone and strength of character. It pained and irritated him upon mature consideration to think that he had acted as foolishly as Angelo Salmon, and with about the same result. He had had rather more than a dim consciousness of being a clever and shrewd fellow until that particular night, and now he could see where he had blundered. The more he stared at the opposite wall, and at the geological maps which were hanging there, the more he became convinced that he had been betrayed by impulse and vanity, and—Heaven have mercy upon him!—by sentiment. His fingers tugged at his long hair in dismay at this. What would Mabel Westbrook think of him when she re-considered

all the nonsense which he had talked during the latter portion of their interview? If he could live that evening over again! If he had not told her of his love she would have respected him more, and he should have been a prouder man. What had been the use of so maudlin an avowal, save to render her distrustful of him? Why could he not have buried deep down in his heart that knowledge which had not even benefited himself? And to tell her that he loved her, a few minutes after giving her, or lending her, all the money which he possessed too, as if he had kept back his passion until he had had the opportunity of offering her a bribe!

“No, no—she will not think that!” he cried aloud—for it was a thought too galling for him in these salutary moments of self-depreciation. “She is warm-hearted, generous, and will do me justice.”

He took a long walk round his room after this, and it was a wise dispensation that there was no human being taking rest in the apartment beneath, he tramped on so persistently, and stamped at times so heavily. Suddenly

he made a dash at his work again. "I am sulking like a child at the inevitable," he said, "and I will *not* have it!"

There was the courage to write a few lines, the manliness to persevere; but his heart was too strong for his brains, and presently the pen dropped, and the blurred manuscript was pushed unconsciously aside. After all, it was pleasant to think of her—even at that hour, and with the bronze clock registering two—to remember all that she had said, to dwell upon the expression of her faith in him, the frank confession of her trust, the acceptance from him of that pecuniary help which she would not have taken at Angelo Salmon's hands, or from anyone but him. Theirs had been a long meeting, full of discussion and explanation, and winding up by love matters that might have been more fittingly postponed, and yet were mercifully terminated for all time; but there was nothing really to regret in the interview, except his own stupidity. She had been as gentle as a true woman should be, and Heaven bless her for it! He hoped the man she loved would make her a good husband; he thought

he would, for Mabel was one to cherish very tenderly, and observant enough not to make a bad choice for herself. To-morrow, or the next day, he should face her as a friend, or a brother, and be very business-like with his friendship and advice, and fight her battles in his old-fashioned, forcible way ; all this, as long as she lived, or as long as he lived, to be a duty and a comfort to him. She had placed confidence in him, she had made less difficulty about accepting his service than he had imagined that she would, and, despite the greed of his relations, the world seemed brightening for her.

But on the morrow the shadows came up thick and fast again, and there was no more brightness in his little world. It was noon, and he was busy in his office downstairs, and two little boys, representing the visitors of Penton, were playing hide-and-seek behind the big glass cases, when a letter came by post to him. It had been dropped in the letter-box at Penton High Street, only a stone's throw from his door, by the bearer, who had not the courage or the inclination to face him again, he

thought. Brian had not seen the handwriting of Mabel Westbrook, but he knew it; it was not his sister's scrawl, and no other woman had ever written a line to him. He opened the letter with impatient hands, and two bank-notes fell out, and fluttered to the floor.

He was business-like to the last. He stooped and picked up the notes before reading a line of the letter; he examined them closely, and inspected carefully the amounts, which were for five hundred pounds each. The thousand pounds had been returned to him. Mabel Westbrook would have none of his support, if it were possible to do without it; she could not, or would not, trust him after all. She knew and saw the great gratification that it would have been to him to help her, and yet her pride had dashed him down like that! This was her return—almost her revenge, he thought—for his refusing the sacrifice of her money to his grandfather; but in what an arrogant spirit, and with how miserable a reason! He had thought her very different from this!

He did not quickly refer to her own explana-

tion of this step. He seemed content to sit there with the notes and the unread letter in his hands, and guess at her resolves and motives. Having worked out the theory to his satisfaction, he took the number of her notes, which he locked within his desk, and then opened the letter, saying, between his set teeth—

“She shall have the money! I will help her, in spite of herself and her miserable pride.”

The first words took away all sense of anger from his heart, however, although there were only three to thrill him with a new and sudden sense of joy. He read them aloud in his exultation and excitement, and his red-haired clerk entering at the minute, stopped at the door with his mouth open.

“My dear Brian!” quoted the curator; “yes,” he added, “that is what it is—my dear Brian!”

“What did you say, sir?” exclaimed the young subordinate.”

“Get out!”

“Yes, sir, but——”

“I’ll attend to you presently. Don’t you hear?”

“Oh! yes—I hear,” said the clerk, who was uncivilly disposed, and quick to retaliate. Brian looked fiercely at him, and the youth vanished at his glance. After his clerk’s departure Brian went on with the perusal of the epistle which Mabel had sent to him, and which we will read with him.

It had no address or date, which for a lady’s letter was not particularly remarkable; it was wild and rambling, which was not remarkable either, and it ran thus :

“MY DEAR BRIAN,

“For you must let me call a true friend thus, as I would call a brother, if I had one. You have acted in brotherly love, and I am very grateful—pray think that whatever happens, and you will only do me justice. Don’t be very, very cross with me for sending back your money—I could not take it—I never intended to make use of it—I should have been a coward and a wretch to rob you of your savings. I have friends—plenty of them—leave me to them, and do not trouble your head and heart with my wilfulness again. You make me

unhappy by your persistence to be of service to me and I have run away from you. Forgive the step, and grant me that which a little while ago I refused to you, if you recollect—*Time*. Only give me time! And believe that I shall remember your unselfishness and value it, and be always

“Yours most faithfully,

“MABEL WESTBROOK.”

“P.S.—You promised at Datchet Bridge to study even my wishes when opposed to your own—do so now, and consider me your debtor. I wish for peace and rest, and time for thought, away from all of you.”

“Away from me, she means!” said Brian, mournfully; “yes, I have frightened her away.”

He locked up her letter and started at once for the villa on the Penton Road, knowing beforehand that she would not be there, feeling sure that she had taken every precaution to evade him and his offers of pecuniary support, and yet wishing to learn the worst at once.

He was right. Mabel had gone away for good, and the landlady did not know in which

direction she had turned. "She was going to leave the city at once," that was all the information which the lodger vouchsafed to impart; and the landlady only knew in addition that the fly had been driven towards the railway station.

Brian called at Penton Bank on his return. He was known to the clerks, and country clerks are more communicative than their London brethren, and less suspicious.

"Can I pay any money into Miss Westbrook's account to-day?" he asked.

"She has closed her account with us," said the cashier.

Brian nodded his head, walked out of the bank, and went back to the Museum, where he once more read the letter which she had sent him.

The following week he was in Liverpool, where he booked a passage for New York, and steamed away to a new world across the Atlantic on the following day, without telling a friend or an acquaintance that he had turned his back on Old England.

BOOK III.

Angelo.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST CALL AT ST. LAZARUS.

IT may be said at once, for the better understanding of the character of our hero—for this hard, angular, crotchety being is all the hero we have to present to our good readers—that Brian Halfday did not start for America with any intention of troubling Mabel Westbrook with his company, and aggravating her by his advice. He had a motive for his journey, that will appear in the due course of this narrative, and there was no scheming to throw himself in her way again. Had he been sure that she was in Boston, had he been certain she would have been pleased to welcome him, he would have kept out of the way. It had been

her wish on the day she had flitted suddenly from Penton ; she had expressed it forcibly and kindly, but none the less had he scared her from her home, and he would not too hastily cast his black shadow across the solitary path she had preferred to pursue. She had begged for time, and he had granted it ; he was neither a bore nor a spy, and he must leave her to herself for awhile, making preparations, none the less intently, for that future of hers over which he had sworn to watch till his life's end, and of which task he was proud.

Of his expedition to America we purpose to keep no record ; the thread of our story is taken up on English ground a few weeks afterwards.

It was the end of October when Brian Half-day was in Penton again, no longer the curator and custodian of the Museum, but a gentleman at large. He had resigned his office before quitting England, and he had no intention of returning to the post which he had quitted. He had no idea, either, of remaining in Penton, although it was his birthplace, and a dreamy old city that suited him—time, since we left

him last, had worked many changes, and given a new turn to his ambitions.

He walked into his office for the letters which had accumulated during his absence; he arranged with his successor for the future despatch of various articles belonging to him, and which were still at the Museum; he chatted for awhile with a stray trustee, who happened to arrive in search of an umbrella he had left four months ago in a corner of the directors' room; he took a last stroll through the building, and pored lovingly over the old relics of which he had had the care, and the histories of which were household words to him; and, finally, he went down the steps with something like a sigh escaping him.

"It was a quiet life, but I was happy there," he muttered; "never unhappy until——"

"Until Mabel Westbrook came," was he going to add, when he stopped his soliloquy, and stamped his foot angrily upon the flinty pathway? Possibly, for he began a fresh sentence in lieu of finishing the preceding.

"Not her fault—but my own stupidity," he said, "and it's well over now."

He walked at a brisk pace from the city to the Hospital of St. Lazarus, like a man who had had his plans of action from the first, and was carrying them out one by one. He had begun his new life in England, and his new thoughts for her who had escaped him, took him, as a beginning, towards the Brotherhood of the Noble Poor. He might fail in the information which he required, but some clue might be found there, and Angelo Salmon or his mother might have learned where Mabel Westbrook was. At all events, he was not disposed to leave Penton until he had asked many questions of many folk, and he went about his mission in a brisk, business-like way. He glanced towards the little villa where Mabel had lived, as he passed—there was a bill in the window, announcing the fact of furnished apartments within,—and he paused some twenty yards further on, as though the idea of making inquiries had struck him suddenly.

“When I come back—and if necessary,” he said; then he resumed his rapid pace, stopping not again till Hodsman, the porter, was look-

ing at him from his door in the Cardinal's Tower.

"Good day," he said.

"Good day to you, Mr. Halfday—for it is Mr. Brian Halfday surely?"

"Have I altered so much since I was here last, Hodsman, that you are in doubt as to my identity?"

"You're looking uncommon well, sir," said Hodsman, "more brown and less dusty like. Been in the country?"

"I have been abroad," answered Brian, "and have come back to look up some of my friends and acquaintances. Is young Mr. Salmon at the Master's quarters? I have business with him."

"Lor' bless you, no, sir," said Hodsman; "he has not been here for a sight of weeks."

"Not since Miss Westbrook left here?"

"That's the very day I saw him last, Mr. Brian, now I come to think of it."

"Do you know where he is to be found?"

"They might tell you at the Master's house—but the Master is away."

"Is Mrs. Salmon there?"

“No—she’s away too.”

“Who is acting for Mr. Salmon?”

“Mr. Cutler.”

“Cutler of Penton Cathedral?” ran on Brian, firing off his questions one after another in his old pop-gun style, and without a moment’s hesitation.

“Yes—he’s——”

But Brian had not stopped for further information. He had walked into the quadrangle, and was hammering away with the knocker of the Master’s door before Mr. Hodsman had finished his sentence, if he had even cared to finish it after the unceremonious departure of the gentleman to whom he had devoted his attention.

It was a noisy summons, which caused the heads of one or two brothers to peer round the entrance door of the Refectory, and transformed a black cat’s placid sleep on a window-sill into a mad flight, all legs and wings, across the grass-plot. Even the servant who responded to Brian’s impetuous knock came to the door pale from sudden fright.

“Is Mr. Cutler within?”

“No, sir, he——”

“Where is he to be found?”

“He is at one of the brothers’ cottages, I think, sir.”

“Which one, do you know?”

“No, sir, I will inquire.”

“It doesn’t matter—I will inquire for myself.”

Brian walked from the Master’s residence to the Refectory. He was a little excited. The Salmons were away, and the consciousness of being balked at the outset of his investigation disturbed his composure seriously. He stepped into the hall and looked round him. The fire was burning in the big central hoop again, for the days were growing cold and lonesome to the old men huddled round the blaze. The Summer had died away for good, and it was doubtful how many of these withered atoms would see another, with life’s span drawn out to its full tension—let the Noble Poor have all the warmth and comfort that this charity afforded, whilst there was time before them.

The brothers were in full force that afternoon; they had gathered together for company’s

sake, or else something of more than usual importance had linked them in a common band, thought Brian. They were talking together in low murmurs, which echoed strangely in the place, and the withered faces turned curiously towards the man who had intruded there as he stepped into the hall.

“Good afternoon, brothers,” said Brian ; “can you tell me where I shall find Mr. Cutler?”

“Good afternoon, Master Brian,” replied those who recognised him. “Mr. Cutler is with brother Peter.”

“Peter Scone?”

“Yes,” said one old man, in a feeble falsetto, “he’s going at last. He has been a long while at it—but the cold last week caught him in the chest, and he’s awful bad, he is.”

“Indeed!” said Brian.

“And Mr. Cutler’s reading to him ; but I don’t think,” said the old man, shaking his head very solemnly, “that Peter likes that kind of thing.”

“Peter was never fond of his Bible, more’s the pity,” said another.

“Peter was never fond of anything,” commented a third.

Brian Halfday passed from the Refectory to the brothers’ houses, and knocked gently at the door of Peter Scone’s room. The sallow face of an old woman was confronting him through the half-open door very shortly after his summons for admittance.

“What is it?”

“Is Mr. Cutler disengaged?” asked Brian; “I would speak to him for a few moments. My name is Halfday.”

“Halfday!” exclaimed a shrill voice, that our hero recognized; “not Adam Halfday come to fetch me already! Don’t say it’s Adam!”

“Hush, hush!” said another voice; “you are exciting yourself unnecessarily, Mr. Scone.”

“Who is it, then?”

“Brian Halfday.”

“The very man we want,” said Mr. Cutler, with evident excitement. “Come in, please, and shut the door behind you, as the draught is keen to-day.”

CHAPTER II.

G R E A T N E W S .

BRIAN HALFDAY complied with the request that had been given him, but a certain amount of fresh air found its way into the room as he entered and set old Peter Scone coughing very violently. Brian glanced at the sufferer in the bed, who closed his eyes as if the sight of the new-comer were unpleasant to him, and who, he fancied, shrank a little as he advanced and touched the waxen hand resting without the coverlet.

“I am sorry, Peter, to find you brought down as low as this,” said Brian; “but it is the lot of each of us in turn.”

“Ye-es—I know,” answered Peter, still breathing with great difficulty after his pa-

roxysm, "but it's an awkward—time of year—for this—business. I always thought—I should go—off nice and warm—in the Summer. What—brought you—here to-day?"

"God's hand must have led him to this house," said Mr. Cutler solemnly.

Brian looked hard at the speaker, who came towards him and shook hands.

"What does this mean?" asked Brian.

"Shall I tell him, Peter, or will you?"

"You had better—tell him, sir," answered Peter Scone in little gasps; "you've more breath than—I have, more's the pity."

"This poor erring mortal, Mr. Halfday," said the clergyman, "has done you and yours a grievous wrong, and is now lying here repentant for all past mistakes. Will you, before he leaves us, forgive his trespasses against you?"

Brian did not hesitate before the yearning face with the seal of death upon it.

"Willingly," he answered.

"Thank—you," said the old man, "thank you, Brian. I am glad you—have come now. But—I wonder—what old Adam will have to say—about it—presently?"

“What harm has this man done me in my time that I should say ‘Forgiveness?’” asked Brian of Mr. Gregory Salmon’s deputy.

“Tell—him,” whispered Peter Scone.

“It is a very short story, but of great importance, that I have heard this morning,” said Mr. Cutler; “your grandfather’s will——”

“What! but go on, go on,” cried Brian—
“what is there to say concerning that?”

“The will which was discovered by your sister in the church, and which you proved and administered to, was not the last will of Adam Halfday,” said the minister; “the day before Adam quitted the Hospital he had quarrelled with his grand-daughter again, and in a fit of pique against her, or thinking he had not done you justice, or for reasons which we cannot sift to a conclusion, he wrote another will, and entrusted it to Scone’s care. It is that will which Peter has kept back.”

“Because—I never thought it—was a fair one,” mumbled Peter. “Because I liked Dorcas—though she never treated me well—better than—I—did—you.”

“Where is that will?” asked Brian.

"It is in my possession," said Mr. Cutler, drawing a piece of paper from his breast-pocket, and tendering it to our hero, "and I am glad to be so quickly relieved of the responsibility connected with it."

Brian in his impatience snatched it from the clergyman's hands, and then became aware of his rudeness.

"I beg your pardon, but so much depends upon this," he said hastily, as he opened the paper and read the few lines which it contained. Having perused the same, he went close to the bedside of Peter Scone again, and looked down at him. Peter coughed, and feebly turned his head away.

"What made you do this?" asked Brian.

"I thought Dorcas would—be liberal with me; and besides——"

"Well?"

"You've been haughty to me all your life—and you didn't—ask me to the funeral," was the old man's answer.

Brian touched the hand of Peter Scone once more.

"That was the one bad turn you spoke of,

as deserving another; but you are sorry now?"

"Yes—very sorry—because—if I had lived a little longer, Dorcas would have—or you might have——"

"Say no more," said Brian, "think of Heaven instead of earth."

"He has been talking of Heaven all day," said Peter in reply; "it's very kind—of him—but I'm a little—sick of it. I—I——"

"Rest, Peter, and then think of Heaven again. Good-bye."

"Good-bye,—I suppose now you—have got all you want—you won't come and see me—any more?"

"I am going away from Penton."

"Won't you come on Sunday?—I shall live—till Sunday, the doctor says."

"I may be many miles away. If I should be in Penton I will come."

"And there's my funeral—will you come to that now? I haven't anyone to follow me I care for—that old cat is chief mourner—my sister Lucretia Scone—Brian."

The sallow-faced woman rose at this odd

introduction, made a courtesy to Brian, and sat down again.

"I don't mind what he says now, sir," said Lucretia in a husky whisper, "he talks a heap of nonsense, and can't last four-and-twenty hours, to my reckoning."

"That's a lie!" said Peter very distinctly.

"Hush, hush, Scone!" cried Mr. Cutler again in mild reproach, "it is too late for hard words—for anything save repentance and faith."

"One moment," said Peter to our hero; "don't be—in such a hurry. Where's William?"

"My father?" asked Brian.

"Ay."

"I do not know."

"I hope he's swinging—somewhere," said Peter maliciously between his gasps; "he ruined my con—con—constitution by knocking—me about that night in the Close. I should have—lived—oh! years longer—but for him. I—I——"

Here his cough seized upon him and racked his frame and took him to the verge of insensibility, as to the verge of the grave, and when

he had recovered he signed for Brian to approach him.

“Say—for—given—again,” he whispered faintly, “and I may—get off—cheap!”

“Forgiven,” answered Brian as he walked moodily from the room into the quadrangle beyond, where the chaplain, doing duty in the absence of the Master, joined him.

“That is a terrible old man,” said Brian, “with the evil clinging to his last shred of life, like a blight that will not quit him. What has such a man lived for all these unprofitable years?”

“Perhaps for repentance even yet,” said the minister.

“You may be right,” answered Brian, thoughtfully still, “and I at least have no right to judge him.”

“The heart of a man——”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Brian, “but I am pressed for time, and have come here for explanations of great moment to me. Where is Angelo Salmon? I shall be grateful for any information you can give me concerning him.”

Mr. Cutler seemed to hesitate.

“Do you wish to see him?”

“Yes.”

“You are a friend of his, then?”

“The best friend he has, perhaps,” said Brian enigmatically.

“He has been very ill—and away from the family,” explained the minister; “three weeks ago Mr. and Mrs. Salmon learned of his illness for the first time.”

“Ill,” said Brian, “then he will not know where she is?”

“Where who is?” asked Mr. Cutler.

“A lady in whom I am interested, and whom I had hoped Angelo’s power of research would have discovered before this.”

“Was Angelo Salmon interested in her also, may I ask?” said Mr. Cutler.

“Yes.”

“Then he has found her.”

“Now, I am glad of that,” exclaimed Brian; “where is she—where is she?”

“You allude to Miss Westbrook, of course?”

“Of course! What other lady? But go on, please.”

“They are all at Scarborough—at the ‘Mas-

todon Hotel,' " said Mr. Cutler; " we have been keeping the address somewhat of a secret, because——"

" All at Scarborough. Who's all?"

" Mr. and Mrs. Salmon are with their son. You have no idea how ill that amiable young fellow has been, Mr. Halfday. I should not have believed that——"

" And Miss Westbrook is with them, you say?" said Brian, interrupting him again.

" Yes."

" Strange they should all have gone together to that fast place," muttered Brian.

" I beg pardon—I did not catch——"

" When are they coming back?"

" Not for some weeks. Angelo is getting rapidly better, but he requires considerable care."

" Yes—yes—a sick man always does. And Miss Westbrook, who was discovered at Scarborough, possibly she will not remain," said Brian, thoughtfully.

" Oh, yes! she is sure to remain for her future husband's sake."

" Her what!" exclaimed Brian Halfday.

“Oh, you don’t know that——”

“I don’t know anything. Go on.”

Mr. Cutler drew himself up stiffly. He was a great man at the Cathedral, and not accustomed to this uncereemonious style of address. Still he vouchsafed a reply.

“Young Mr. Salmon and Miss Westbrook are engaged to be married at Christmas.”

CHAPTER III.

IN THE NORTH.

IT was a late season at Scarborough, and fashion and frivolity lingered at "the queen of watering-places." It was warm, dry Autumn weather, and visitors with time to spare were thick upon the Spa still. The dandies and the would-be dandies, the unmistakable West-end loungers and the unmistakable West-end cads, the men of the clubs and the men of the streets, the retired tradesmen and the broad-shouldered manufacturers from the North, the dyspeptic, the bilious, the creaky, the fortune-hunters and the fortune-spenders, the great army of marriageable misses, and the shady camp-followers whose identity was doubtful, the widows

looking out boldly for their second husbands, and the widowers timidly for their second wives, the men who never meant to marry, and told everybody so, and the men who were married and told nobody—they were all loafing and leering and flirting at this hot-bed by the sea.

The great “Mastodon Hotel,” if not full to its ninth story, as in the height of its season it is bound to be, was doing well, and the waiters were not yet in expectation of the warning which comes with the cold and wet at Scarborough. The genial, good-tempered manager was in extra spirits with his extra season; the *table-hôte* was served to a goodly number of guests in the great dining-hall; and there were dances thrice a week for all the light-heeled and light-headed folk who killed time and broke hearts to waltz music.

One of these after-dinner dances was in course of progression at the “Mastodon Hotel,” when Brian Halfday descended the broad staircase into the hall, and looked about him. He had brushed off the dust of a long day’s journey, but had not troubled himself to put on evening

dress and white kids, and launch into festive proceedings forthwith. He did not look festive in his black suit and thick-soled boots, and the expression of his countenance was not hilarious. It was a stern, pale face, at which more than one visitor glanced askance, as if it were out of place there, and to be marvelled at in such society. It was watchful as well as stern, and the thin steel-framed spectacles which he had perched on the bridge of his nose gave an additional sharpness to the black eyes glittering behind the crystal. He was short-sighted, and required artificial means to look about him thoroughly—and he had come to the “Mastodon Hotel” with that purpose, to begin with. To those of whom he was in search he had offered no warning of his approach; he wished to study them for himself, and to come upon them by surprise. They might be glad or sorry to see him, he did not know which, and he did not care, he was inclined to believe—though in his “heart of hearts” he knew better than that, so far as one particular person was concerned. He had come on business, he considered also—the grave, unadulterated business of another’s

welfare; but he was in no hurry, and such business as his could bide its time. He was in no great hurry, either, to discover the object of his search. After one stroll in the background of the ball-room, where the dancers were too busy to take notice of him, he seated himself in a corner of the cool hall beyond, and read a local paper which he had purchased at the railway-station and brought on in his pocket. It was a difficult and double performance, that of reading and watching thus, as he had to read over his glasses, and to scrutinize people through them; but Brian Halfday was equal to the occasion. He mastered the local news, he went carefully through the visitors' lists, and a detective police officer looking out for "somebody" could not have been more vigilant in his inspection of the guests as they promenaded in the central hall after the dance, or strolled towards the coffee-room for refreshments. Nothing escaped Brian Halfday, and his studious mood was as far from him that night as was the Museum in old Penton.

His vigilance was not quickly rewarded. Amongst the dancers and saunterers of the

“Mastodon Hotel” there was no sign of the Salmons or Miss Westbrook ; but the hour was not late, and Brian was a man of immense patience when he had made up his mind to pursue a task to the end. In this instance patience was rewarded by the late appearance of Miss Westbrook and Mrs. Salmon, who came together down the staircase from their rooms. Brian applied himself more diligently to the paper, which he held very closely to his eyes, without losing sight of them, and with his heart thrilling in an unsatisfactory and troublesome manner.

Was it possible that he had not forgotten Mabel, or outlived the one foolish fancy which had crossed his prosaic life, or settled down to the fact that woman’s love, or trust, or friendship, was never to fall to his share? Or was it only his old interest in her, which he did not want to die away, and which had brought him to the Yorkshire coast, that was disturbing his serenity *pro tem.*? Surely his interest alone. He was not so daft as to allow a hopeless passion to trouble him at his age, and with his sober thoughts to back him. It was only his old

interest—and that was to last as long as she lived, and under every circumstance of her life and his.

She was looking very beautiful, he thought, in her high-necked black silk dress, and with a white camellia in her hair; he should have felt disappointed at discovering her in one of those flimsy, flaunting ball-dresses with which many of the ladies had over-adorned themselves that evening. She was a sensible girl too, and would not whirl round in insane fashion with the rest of the volatile crowd that had already depressed him by its exuberance of spirits. She would sit down, and observe society at high pressure, and amuse good Mrs. Salmon with her clever comments on passing things; and presently he would steal to her side with all his news, and be rewarded by her welcome smiles. He thought she would be glad to see him now; he had been six weeks away from her, he had given her the time for which she had pleaded, he had kept his word and kept his money, and there could not be the shadow of a reproach on her sweet face after this implicit obedience.

He read his paper again, or affected to read it, until he thought Mabel and her companion were comfortably seated in the ball-room; he gave one final glance at the broad staircase and the upper gallery running round the dome-shaped hall, half in expectation of the smooth face of Angelo Salmon beaming at him from some corner of the vast establishment, and then he rose and walked towards the ball-room. At the same instant the music struck up a waltz, the dancers spun along merrily and madly, and a few prudent couples, requiring more room and less heat, came twirling into the cool hall, and danced round the palm-tree trophy in the centre.

Brian sat down again—this time in a seat more open to observation. He had altered his mind suddenly, for Mabel Westbrook was dancing—actually dancing!—with a tall, long-whiskered individual who had placed one arm lightly round her waist, and was holding her little gloved hand in his. Strange and miserable sensation to come to a man of his iron mould, thought Brian; but for an instant there fell upon him a heart-sickness, and dizziness, and

terrible despondency that was utterly beyond his own analysis, although capable of the simplest solution in the world. There was a sense of anger following close upon this feeling that disturbed his mind, made his pulses throb, and assured him his contentment was at an end for that night. He felt as if he had been altogether deceived in his estimate of Mabel Westbrook's character—as if he had over-rated her and made a goddess from materials common to all women, frivolous and vain. In his estimation, he had set her on so high a pedestal that to see her in that caravansary, the partner in a dance with a long-legged simpleton whose title to her notice was the money he paid weekly for his board and lodging, vexed him and rendered him uncharitable.

It was Brian Halfday's dark hour, and the length of the dance and the untiring zeal of the dancers did not tend to lighten it. The old harsh, sullen mood, which Dorcas knew too well, had descended on him, and wrapped him in a cloud.

Brian had always hated dancing—with the uncompromising and bitter hate of a man who

cannot or will not dance—and had inveighed against it more than once in his life, and to sit calmly there and see the woman he loved, or the woman for whom he had the highest respect, according to his own idea, acting as frivolously as the rest of the people about him, was a blow from which he could not readily recover. He crumpled up his newspaper, and tossed it behind his chair; whereon he sat with a glaring countenance and watched the business of the night. Presently Mabel Westbrook caught sight of him over the shoulder of her partner, and her eyes grew larger and her face redder, as though “long whiskers” were squeezing her—but she was in doubt concerning his identity, as Brian wore glasses and glared at her through them without a sign of recognition. When the waltz was over, and she and her partner were passing him again, she glanced at him and met his dark, steady, staring eyes. Yes, it was he—there was a certain contraction of his bushy eyebrows by which at last she was sure of him. She drew her hand from her partner’s arm immediately, and with a “Thank you,” dismissed him.

Then she came towards Brian, the genuine, unaffected woman whom he had always known, and the stolid look with which he met her did not quench her smiles as she approached.

"Mr. Halfday—you here!" she exclaimed; "I could not believe it was you."

Mr. Brian Halfday rose and shook hands with cold formality. Mabel read his rigid countenance incorrectly, and turned pale.

"Is anything the matter?" she inquired; "have you brought me bad news?"

"No, Miss Westbrook," answered Brian.

"Why did you not speak to me before?—or look as if you recognised me?"

"You were too busily engaged," said Brian, drily; "I should have been an intrusion upon you."

Mabel was unprepared for this reception, and although a high-spirited girl, was not one who took offence readily at a slight. And she *was* glad to see Brian Halfday.

"Do you mean that I was dancing?"

"Yes."

"Don't you like dancing?" she inquired.

"I cannot say I see much to admire in

it," he answered; "but it is more out of place here—more foolish and frivolous—than usual."

"Indeed," said Mabel.

"I would as soon dance in a cook-shop," he added, very bitterly; "and I would as soon have expected you to dance there as in this menagerie."

Brian's remarks failed in their effect in this instance from their very extravagance of malignity. Mabel could guess pretty shrewdly at the motives for his anger, and her keen sense of humour dispelled the first flutterings of resentment which had come to her. She laughed merrily at him, and this did not tend to his composure.

"I am pleased to find you in such excellent spirits this evening, Miss Westbrook," he said satirically; "it repays me for the trouble of this long journey in search of you."

"Have you come all this way on my account?" inquired Mabel innocently.

"Certainly I have."

"I am highly honoured," she replied in a stately manner at last.

"It would be out of place to speak here of the motive for my troubling you," Brian continued, in the same cold tone which he had at first adopted, "and therefore I purpose deferring my explanation to a more convenient opportunity."

"As you please," said Mabel indifferently; "but why is it out of place at the present time?"

"Your new friends will be seeking you out, and I do not care to be interrupted by them," was the answer.

"I have no new friends."

"Who was the fellow dancing with you, then?" he asked abruptly.

"The *gentleman* with whom I was dancing, Mr. Halfday," she said, with emphasis, "is Captain Amherst, of the United States' Navy."

"Ah! the man of whom you told me," exclaimed Brian; "but, no! he was a dry goods man, I remember."

"This gentleman I have met at the hotel," said Mabel, repressing a smile with difficulty, "that's all."

“Yes—that’s all,” said Brian, more mournfully than angrily now; “what a big, miserable, and soul-depressing book the history of chance acquaintances would make! what tragic stories it would contain—what horrors!”

“Is there anything tragic or horrible in my meeting with Captain Amherst?” inquired Mabel.

“No,” Brian replied, “there is more of pantomime than tragedy about *him*!”

“I am afraid you know very little concerning Captain Amherst, and have no right to comment upon him in this manner,” said Mabel, indignant in real earnest at last.

“I am extremely sorry if I have hurt your feelings by my remarks upon the gentleman,” said Brian, more politely; “I simply replied to your questions.”

“Yes—after your own fashion,” answered Mabel, shrugging her shoulders.

“I thought I might speak frankly to you—but I am mistaken, I see,” Brian continued, “or else you are greatly changed since our last meeting.”

She looked at him steadily and unflinchingly.

“Yes—I am greatly changed,” she said.

CHAPTER IV.

A BAD TEMPER.

IT was not a happy renewal of the acquaintance between Brian Halfday and Mabel Westbrook. There was something ominous in it. The world had surely changed as well as Mabel, and everything was different about him since he, Brian Halfday, had come back from America. Well, who was he, to expect that a woman should be of one mind for weeks together, or that Mabel Westbrook was a brilliant contrast to her sex, or the world was going to stop whilst he was on his travels?

He was asking himself these questions, but hardly in the same misanthropic, discontented mood as had oppressed him within the last

half-hour, when Mrs. Gregory Salmon emerged from the ball-room in search of her companion, and discovered her by Brian's side, looking as grave and thoughtful as the gentleman.

"My dear Mabel," said Mrs. Salmon, "I could not imagine what had become of you. Captain Amherst told me you had met with a friend, but——"

"This is Mr. Brian Halfday," remarked Mabel; "I do not know if you are personally acquainted with him, Mrs. Salmon, but you have heard Angelo and me speak of him frequently."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Salmon, offering her hand to him very cordially, "yes—poor Angelo often speaks of you. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Halfday."

Brian had no resource save to bow politely, and shake the extended hand, but he would have been glad to dispense with the lady's company at this juncture. He wanted Mabel to himself, and he was sorry already for the last impression that he had left on Mabel's mind. Having blown off his extra steam, he was disposed, after the manly fashion of his tribe, to be amiable. The satisfaction of being near

her, of looking at her, of listening to the music of her voice, was exercising its natural effect upon him, and dissipating in a great degree his sullenness.

"They have been making inquiries about you, Mabel, and there is a partner searching for you now," said Mrs. Salmon, looking round Brian at our heroine.

"He will not have far to search," answered Mabel; "I suppose the gentleman does not expect me to look after him."

"Very likely he does—at the 'Mastodon,' " Brian added curtly, and then was sorry that he had said it, for it destroyed his last chance of making himself agreeable to Mabel that evening. The gentleman in question was before them the instant afterwards, and Mabel made no excuse for keeping at Brian's side, as he was vain enough to think she might do, after his expression of opinion upon dancing in general. She rose with a smile and took her partner's arm.

"I will leave Mrs. Salmon to tell you the news, Mr. Halfday," said Mabel, and away she went, laughing and chatting into the ball-room.

Brian ground his teeth together, plucked off his spectacles, polished them with his handkerchief, put them on again, and then turned so quickly towards Mrs. Salmon that that good but nervous lady jumped in her chair spasmodically.

"Miss Westbrook has regained her spirits in a marvellous degree," he said, frowning at Mrs. Salmon as if to check in the bud any dissent from his opinion.

"She has generally excellent spirits," replied Mrs. Salmon; "I have never known her actually depressed."

"I have," said Brian; "despite an attempt to appear light-hearted and cheerful, I have seen her very thoughtful and sad."

"Poor girl, she has had a deal to trouble her," said Mrs. Salmon, with a heavy sigh; "and I have thought once or twice myself, that she was less happy than she appeared to be. But I don't know—I can't say—still that is why I persuaded her this evening to come downstairs and participate in these pleasant little festivities."

"Oh! it was you, was it?" cried Brian, to the lady's amazement. "I should have thought a

more suitable distraction for Miss Westbrook's mind might have been discovered than dancing in that mixed mob—but Miss Westbrook knows best. What does your son say?"

"My son?" repeated Mrs. Salmon.

This was an extremely vacuous old woman, thought Brian; had she forgotten she had a son in existence? he wondered. But Mrs. Salmon was only discomfited by Brian's abruptness, and by every question and remark which he seemed to throw violently at her. Mr. Halfday was an extraordinary young man, it was evident—she had heard so before, and now she was sure of it. She was sorry that she had been left with him—she would have been very thankful to her husband if he had come downstairs from his whist in the drawing-room to her rescue. She was not at all surprised that Mabel Westbrook had taken the first opportunity to escape, although to leave her to take her place was scarcely as friendly as might have been expected under the circumstances.

"I am alluding to your son Angelo, Mrs. Salmon," said Brian.

"Yes—exactly. What does he say, you

say?" she added, in a manner still more confused.

"Dancing at this hotel can hardly be the amusement which your son has recommended to Miss Westbrook," Brian remarked.

"Yes, he has," replied Mrs. Salmon, "for he thought—which is singular, now I think of it—that Mabel was very dull this evening. And he persuaded her to come down with me—and a nice company I fancy it is. Don't you, Mr. Halfday?"

"I don't. But I am looking at it with a jaundiced eye, perhaps," replied Brian, more amiably.

"Dear me—are you, though?" and Mrs. Salmon, who no more comprehended metaphor than Joe Miller, looked with motherly interest at Brian's eyes at once. "Ah! that's a very bad sign. The weather perhaps, or a change of diet."

Brian regarded Mrs. Salmon with renewed wonder. Was she satirising him, or talking in sober earnest? If the latter, he was not surprised at Angelo's weakness of character, and could see how surely he had come to it by in-

heritance. Sons took after their mothers, he had always heard, and this lady at his side was a poor, weak specimen of human nature enough.

"I do not think, if it were my lot to be engaged to a lady, that I could rest complacently in my own room whilst she was dancing her heart out elsewhere," said Brian, half to himself, and half for the edification of his companion, "for—your son *is* engaged to Miss Westbrook, is he not?" he asked, springing another mine of words at her.

Mrs. Salmon jumped nervously again. What an uncomfortable young man this was, to be sure!

"Really, Mr. Halfday, I don't know that I ought to answer that question," she stammered forth. "I—I don't know if Mabel, or—or Angelo, would like me to reply to it until everything is settled."

"Then everything is not settled?"

"No—yes—I mean—pray ask Miss Westbrook," replied Mrs. Salmon, betraying considerable agitation now; "I would greatly prefer your talking to Miss Westbrook about this. She would feel hurt if I had told you in

her absence, all that she can explain so much more easily for herself."

"Miss Westbrook has deserted us," said Brian.

"She will return in a few minutes. Did you come to Scarborough to-day?"

"Miss Westbrook will not trouble herself to return to us very quickly," said Brian; "there is that ridiculous quadrille to get through, and her partner will have to amuse her afterwards with the gossip and scandal of the place. I suppose there is no intention of keeping this engagement a secret from the world?"

"Oh dear!—oh dear!" said Mrs. Salmon, without responding to his persistent inquiry.

"She would not be ashamed of her choice—if she had made it—and I take it no one in your family would be foolish enough to wish to conceal the honour she has done you by accepting your son," said Brian; "I cannot imagine any reason for so paltry a reserve."

Mrs. Salmon was to astonish Brian Halfday still more that evening.

"You—you will not wait till Mabel comes," she said; "oh! Mr. Halfday, I hope you will not worry me any more. I can't bear it!"

She burst into tears, and buried her face in her lace handkerchief.

Brian rose from his seat.

"In some unaccountable way I have distressed you, Mrs. Salmon," he said, "and I ask your pardon. It was unintentional. I will withdraw."

"Th—thank you," she sobbed softly; "I am—so much—obliged to you."

Brian Halfday walked moodily away. What new mystery was here? Why had Mrs. Salmon displayed all this emotion at a few questions which it was natural he should put to her as a friend of Mabel Westbrook's? Why had she referred him to Miss Westbrook? What did it all mean? He walked to the door of the ball-room and looked in. They were dancing the last figure with more vigour than was absolutely necessary, he thought, and after a fresh scowl at Mabel and her partner, he turned away and went slowly up the broad staircase leading to his room. He would go to bed. He was no fit company for anybody that night; he seemed to disturb the equanimity of everyone whom he encountered, and he was best out of the way. Probably he should be in a better frame of mind

to-morrow. That weeping incomprehensibility downstairs might be right, and there *was* something in the air which had disturbed his serenity. He had no recollection of being so completely dissatisfied with himself and everybody else as he was on the present occasion.

On the top of the first flight of steps he paused to look in at the drawing-room, bright with gas and gilding, and where a few quiet folk were playing whist, and one noisy youth of a musical turn banging away with tremendous energy on a grand piano. The Reverend Gregory Salmon was absorbed in his trumps, or he would have caught sight of Brian's face immediately in front of him.

A waiter passing suggested a new thought to Brian. "One moment," he said; "here."

The waiter approached him.

"You know that stout gentleman at the first table, I suppose?" asked Brian, pointing to the Master of St. Lazarus.

"Mr. Salmon, sir—yes, sir. Been staying here some weeks, sir," replied the waiter promptly.

"Where is young Mr. Salmon this evening?"

"I have not seen him about, sir. I'll inquire, sir. I'll——"

"Do you know the number of his room?"

"Twenty-eight, sir—the first-floor, sir."

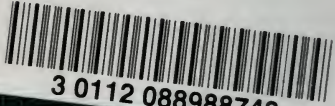
"Thank you."

Brian Halfday went up a few more steps to the left, and turned into a well-lighted corridor. He glanced at the numbers on the doors as he passed, and discovered that he was facing Room No. 28 before he had quite made up his mind what to do. It seemed a polite and gracious task to pay a visit to Angelo Salmon, and hear the news from this quarter; he was only returning a call that had been made him once at Penton Museum, and he felt tolerably certain that Angelo would be glad to see him, but still he hesitated.

It was for an instant only, for he was naturally quick to resolve. He raised his hand to knock on the panels of the door, when the figure of a woman rustled rapidly along the corridor towards him. It was Mabel Westbrook approaching him in haste, and he waited for her.

"Don't knock. You must not go in there!" said Mabel breathlessly, as she came up with him.

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